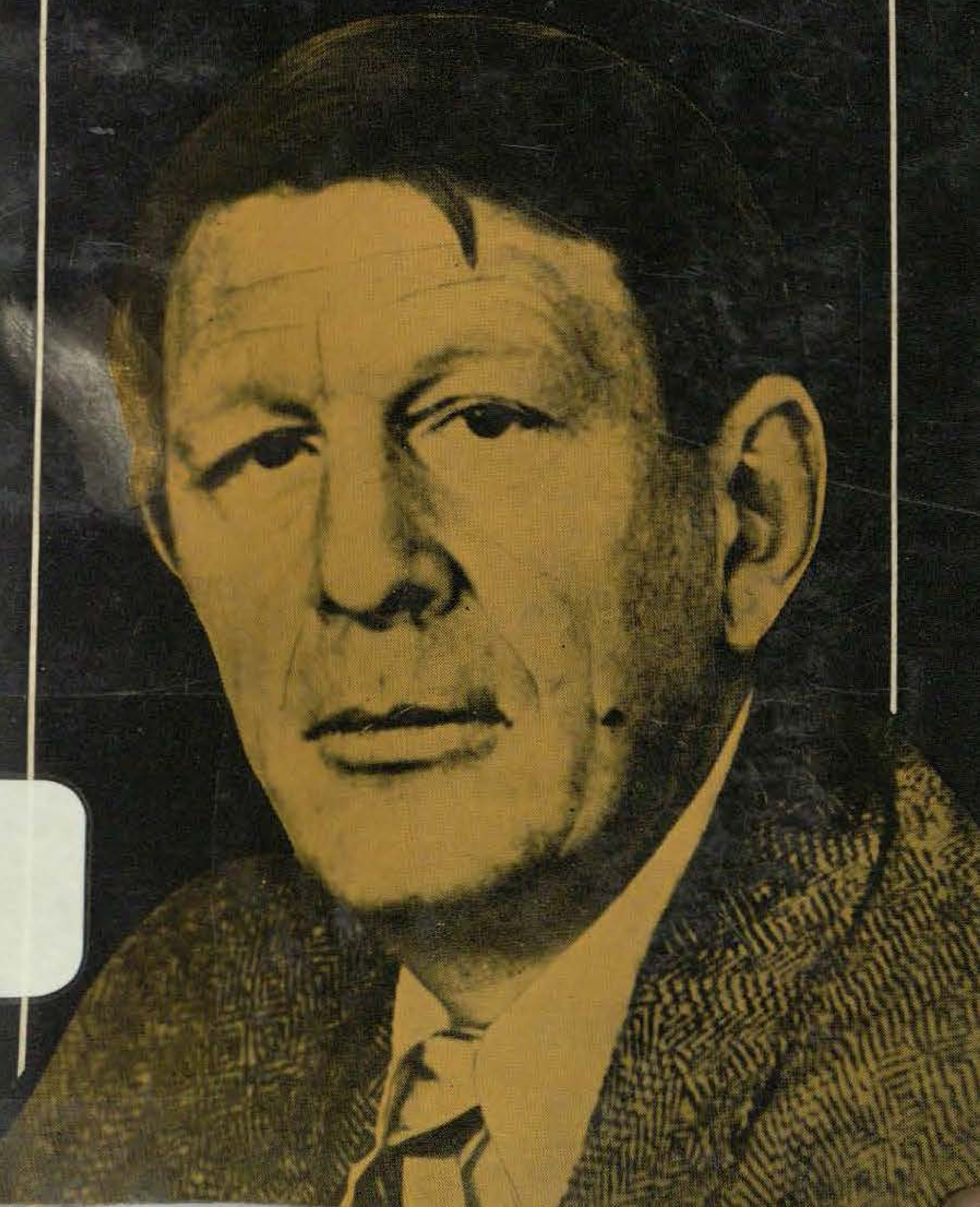
R.N. Srivastava

W.H. AUDEN The Poet



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By

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PREFACE

W. H. Auden was the most important and influential English poet after T.S. Eliot. He made his reputation as the most representative poet of the nineteen-thirties when he was hailed as a prodigy, a poet of great promise, and a challenging stylist. But after his migration to America, and the change in the tone and content of his poetry, critics started pulling him down from the high pedestal on which they themselves had placed him. It was said that his American poetry was not half as satisfying as his early poetry. Few critics realized that his religious poetry was only a fulfilment and a culmination of his early beliefs.

The purpose of this study is two fold: (1) to strike a balance in Auden criticism—he has either been overrated or underrated, condemned wholesale or praised to the skies—but seldom seen in true perspective, and (2) to bring Auden within the reach of Indian students who almost invariably dismiss him as a 'difficult' poet. The task has not been easy, for Auden is a complex poet, and his technical virtuosity baffles even the most accomplished reader of modern poetry. A few poems have also been critically analyzed to enable the students to appreciate them better. It is hoped that this book will be found useful both by the students and the advanced readers of Auden.

My grateful thanks are due to my colleague Dr. P. C. David who has renderd me immense help in the preparation of this book. I am also grateful to my Publishers Messrs Doaba House for their infinite patience and ungrudging cooperation in this venture.

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THE EARLY AUDEN

Wystan Hugh Auden is the most outstanding poet of the nineteen thirties. Although some of his poems had been printed by Stephen Spender on a hand-press in 1928, and his Charade *Paid on Both Sides* had been published by T. S. Eliot in the *Criterion*, his first full-scale book of poems was published only in 1930. But he acquired such popularity as a poet that *New Verse*, a well-known magazine of poetry, brought out a special number on Auden in November, 1937, and wrote : "He is the first English poet for many years who is a poet all the way round." Few poets in our century have acquired such distinction so early in life.

Auden was born in New York in 1907. His father was a medical officer who, soon after Auden's birth, shifted the family to Birmingham. Auden received his early education at Gresham's School, Holt, where he took a keen interest in mining and geology and aspired to become an engineer. But a friend suggested to him that he should write poetry, and so Auden started writing poetry. When he went to Christ Church College, Oxford, his interest in poetry increased tremendously. He became editor of the "Oxford Poetry" which he edited with Charles Plumb in 1926 and with Cecil Day Lewis in 1927. Here he also made friends with Stephen Spender and other potential writers who later became known as the "Auden Group." After Auden came out of Oxford in 1928, he went to Germany and stayed in Berlin for sometime, but then returned home and became a school master—a job which he really enjoyed and in which he was eminently successful. Meanwhile, he kept up his interest in poetry and acquired a good deal of literary success. In 1935 he married a girl called Erika Mann and

after a year gave up his job and went to Iceland with Louis Mac Neice for a couple of months. In 1937, he made a trip to Spain to have a first-hand idea of the civil war raging there, and on return to England published his famous poem called "Spain". In 1938, his wander-lust took him to China and the United States where he and his companion Christopher Isherwood decided to return, for both of them strongly felt that this was the country where they wished to settle down.

Accordingly, on January 18, 1939 Auden and Isherwood left England to live in America, and in 1946 acquired American citizenship. But Auden kept on writing and publishing poetry and visiting Europe now and then. In 1956 he was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He held the post with great distinction until 1961 when he was succeeded by Robert Graves. Auden went back to live in the United States until he was invited again by his own college, Christ Church, to live on its campus but he could not live there long as death descended upon him in September 1973.

Most gifted of the younger English poets, Auden made an indelible impact on his contemporaries who accepted him as their representative voice. Among his friends and admirers were such distinguished writers as Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, Rex Warner and Louis MacNeice. While Auden was still in his early twenties, Charles Madge, a college friend wrote :

> But there waited for me in the summer morning
> Auden, fiercely. I read, shuddered and knew.

Auden was the only one of his group who found a personal language in the modern idiom, and this distinguished him from the rest of the poets of the nineteen thirties.

T. S. Eliot was the strongest influence on the young English poets of the 1930s. After the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, Eliot had become a recognized force in Englsh poetry. Younger poets looked upon him as their model and he remained 'the literary dictator' for a whole generation of poets and critics. Auden, too, came under his spell even while he was a student at Oxford. He is reported to have told his tutor at Christ Church that "only Eliot was worth the serious consideration of poetic aspirants." He, therefore, closely studied Eliot's poetry and

criticism, assimilated his various theories and later developed them in the light of his personal ideas and beliefs.

Other early influences on Auden were A. E. Housman and Walter de La Mare whose anthology *Come Hither* (1923) he read with great passion and in 1939 remarked that it, "more than any book I have read before or since, taught me what poetry is." Thomas Hardy, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost were other important early influences on him.

In 1941, however, Auden described Dante, Langland and Pope as three major influences on him. But he also admired Dryden, Tennyson and Robert Bridges. Other important influences on him were Hopkins, Robinson, Emile Dickinson and Rilke. Auden was well-versed in the entire tradition of English poetry including the Anglo-Saxon and the Middle English poetry. His works will leave anyone convinced about his great catholicity of taste and profound understanding of tradition, respect for which he might have learned from his early master T. S. Eliot. Eliot might also have been responsible for his adulation of Dante.

The nineteen thirties were a period of severe economic depression in England as in America. The after-effects of the first world war plunged the entire country in gloom. As J. M. Keynes, the eminent British economist wrote in his book *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, the economic consequences of the Peace Treaty were disastrous for Britain. The consequences became most evident in the thirties when unemployment became rampant and poverty widespread. People were groaning under cruelty, oppression and social injustice. There was a feeling of dejection and frustration all around. It was a period, as Auden described it, of "smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals", and "a time of crisis and dismay". Conditions were rife for a social revolution. Auden, who was trying to make his mark as a poet at this time naturally became interested in the condition of the people and the problems with which they were confronted. He became disillusioned at first but soon started looking for new directions. Some young writers at this time were becoming interested in Marxism which seemed to them a panacea for all evils. These writers held firmly to the view that there could be no justification for the theory of "art for art's sake" at a time of oppression

and cruelty. Art had to be geared to the needs of the time. This had been done in Russia and Germany where, they argued, writers inspired by Marxism had used literature for the reform of society and the upliftment of the down-trodden. Most of the writers of the thirties including Stephan Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice had come under Marxist influence. Auden also saw a ray of hope in this ideology. Convinced that the post-war civilization was disintegrating, he thought it his moral duty to protect it, and so decided to employ his art in the service of society. Soon he became a champion of social justice and began to emphasize the need for a revolution to bring about the necessary change in the structure of society.

In his approach to the problems of his time Auden was also influenced by Freud, Groddeck and Homer Lane. Even while at Oxford, Auden had become specially interested in psychology and acquired an extensive knowledge of modern psychology. The thirties were the time when the knowledge of psychology was specially helpful. Auden learnt from Homer Lane the need and value the "change of heart" for the betterment of the masses. From Groddeck ahd Freud he learnt to communicate unusual imaginative excitement which led him to myth-making of a sort. Auden's psychological interests were very deep and varied, even greater than his social and political interests. The 'lonely and the unhappy' bothered him most and he endeavoured to bring them solace and comfort through his understanding of human psychology. More than anything else, he was interested in man's dilemmas, in his struggle to keep his soul pure and clean, in his effort to develop a sense of moral responsibility.

EARLY POETRY

Poems (1930)

Auden started writing poetry when he was an undergraduate at Oxford. He wrote on an average, "one poem in three weeks." But he held definite views about poetry even as a student. He told Stephen Spender who used to seek Auden's opinion and advice in writing poetry, that "A poet must have no opinions, no decided views which he seeks to put across in his poetry"; that "Poetry must in no way be concerned with

politics"; that "Poems should not have titles"; that "The subject of a poem is only a peg to hang the poetry on"; that "a poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life" and that "modern poetry should not be written in conventional verse patterns".

An attitude of detachment is the most obvious and important characteristic of Auden's early poetry. At this stage he is interested only in stating questions. No protests and no answers. One must not look for them in poetry. He believed that poetry must concern itself with shape and not with colours and smells as the Romantics thought. Form was the most important thing to him in poetry, but his form did not grow from within, it was given to this poem. He made poems out of his observations and literary influences, as if in a laboratory, keeping himself emotionally detached whether he was writing of cruelty or misery or murder. This is what he meant by "clinical, dispassionate" attitude.

Auden's first collection of poems was published in 1930. The 1928 volume had been printed privately and was limited to 45 copies. Most of the poems in this volume were reprinted in *Poems 1930* which also included *Paid on Both Sides*. Twentyone new poems were added and eleven (out of the twentysix in *Poems 1928*) dropped. Christopher Isherwood, Auden's friend and admirer tells us that in order to understand Auden's poetry, we must remember three things. First, that he was essentially a scientist, that is, his training was scientific, and he had scientific interests. Second, that he was a musician and a ritualist and that, if he had his way, he would have turned every play into a cross between grand opera and high mass. Third, that Auden was a Scandinavian and his works show a considerable influence of the sagas on which he was brought up.

Besides the sagas, Auden's early poems are full of influences of the poets he had taken a fancy for. The following poem, for example, shows a marked influence of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas

> Sixty odd years of poaching and drink
> And rain-sodden waggons with scarcely a friend,
> Chained to this life ; rust fractures a link,

So the end.
Sexton at last has pressed down the loam,
He blows on his fingers and prays for the sun,
Parson unvests and turns to his home,
Duty done.
Little enough stays musing upon
The passing of one of the masters of things,
Only a bird looks peak-faced on,
Looks and sings.

(The Carter Funeral)

Or notice the influence of Emily Dickenson in the following lines

Nor sorrow take
His endless look

The traces of the poet Auden was reading at a particular time became apparent in the poems that he wrote during that time, but soon these traces disappeared making room for others. That is why Isherwood described the influences as "crazes."

Auden was a very prolific writer. His close friends inform us that if he did not like a poem, he threw it away but saved the most beautiful line or lines in it and later made them into another poem. He did not care if the poem lacked coherence or if it was not about a single experience. Often it is, as Stephen Spender puts it, "a mosaic held together by the consistency of an atmosphere, a rhythm or an idea common to all its parts." He was able to overcome this lack of the sense of the inner form of the poem to some extent in his later poetry, but in his early poetry this is very common. This is mainly responsible for the so-called obscurity in his early poems. But his clipped, disconnected style was not without a motive. Eliot had been saying that modern poetry must be difficult. Auden in order to look modern created 'difficulty' in this way. But this was not the only way. He created difficulty also by handling language in a very unusual manner, specially by a clever manipulation of syntax and diction by leaving out connectives and suppressing the context as in the following stanza in *Poems 1930*.

A neutralizing peace
And an average disgrace
Are honour to discover
For later other.

Obscurity also results from his constant experiments with new forms. Describing his early verse, Richard Hoggart observes : "It is the verse of a young man prepared to experiment widely with forms and manners of expression, but particularly suspicious of lustness, and anxious to evolve a hard cerebral style." And then the incongruity of theme and poetic expression made matters more difficult. So many of the themes of the early poems revealed attitudes traditionally associated with Romanticism. We find in these poems sometimes a nostalgia for childhood, sometimes a yearning for a trust in the unconscious and sometimes a good deal of trust in the perfectability of man. These themes have been expressed in an anti-romantic manner, giving rise to a lot of complexity and incongruity.

Obscurity is also caused by the use of the poet's personal experiences and private symbols. The other members of the so-called 'group'—Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice and Cecil Day Lewis also did the same thing in their poetry, making it difficult for the reader to understand it. Lastly, the poet addressed himself to a small, select audience. This made the ordinary reader's task extremely difficult. *The Waste Land*, in fact, was the trend-setter : the poet must address himself to a specifically intellectual audience. Any poet who liked to be called 'modern' had to keep off "the highroad of communication" and withdraw into "an esoteric fastness." Obscurity thus became the hall-mark of modern poetry. And Auden, himself an intellectual, and wishing to be modern by all means, fell a prey to the fashion of the times. Malcolm Cowley was led to remark, "His (Auden's) principal fault, I think, is his damned and perverse obscurity." But Auden did not indulge in obscurity for its own sake. Criticising obscurity in poetry, he said : "One must begin by distinguishing between riddle, which is, I believe, a fundamental element in poetry, and obscurity which is an aesthetic vice." As Auden matured as a poet, obscurity ceased to be his 'principal fault'.

The scenery of Auden's early poems is usually mountainous, but the sun or the blue sky or the trees and brooks have no special fascination for him. He also dislikes the sea, perhaps, as one critic has suggested, because of its formlessness. When the setting of the poem is urban, he is usually pre-occupied with decaying industries or closed factories His family had moved to Birmingham when he was a child so he had had a first-hand knowledge of economic depression. Here he also developed a liking 'for the soiled productive cities' which later found place in his poetry :

> Tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery
> That was, and is, my ideal scenery.

He had also seen society disintegrating in Berlin during his visit to Germany in 1928-1929. The impressions he formed then found expression in his early poems :

> Power stations locked, deserted, since they drew the boiler fires ;
> Pylons fallen or subsiding, trailing dead high tension wires ;
> Head-gears gaunt on grass-grown pit-banks, seams abandoned years ago ;
> Drop a stone and listen for its splash in flooded dark below.
>
> (Poem XXII)

Some of Auden's early poems are 'symptomatic', that is, he talks about the symptoms of the diseases spreading in the society and some of them seek to provide the 'cure' and are infused with missionary zeal. The 'cure' that he thought best in his early years was being 'pure in the heart'. He had been inspired by Homer Lane and Freud and Groddeck to launch a regular campaign for love. One must begin by loving oneself, and then extend this love to his neighbours and friends and everybody who needs it. This was possible only by getting over one's feelings of hatred and guilt. Auden started sermonizing for he believed in the theory that art must teach. He felt that psychology alone was not enough to deal with man and his problems, it had to take the help of poetry (which he described

'handmaid to Psychology'). He elucidated this in his Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue* :

"... . like psychology, poetry is a struggle to reconcile the unwilling subject and object ; in fact, that since psychological truth depends so largely on context, poetry, the parabolic approach, is the only adequate medium for psychology."

Auden's thesis is best illustrated by the last poem of the 1930 volume, the poem which he later called "Petition" in *The Collected Poetry.*

> Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
> But will his negative inversion, be prodigal.
> Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
> Curing the intolerable neural itch,
> The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
> And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
> Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
> And gradually correct the coward's stance ;
> Cover in time with beams those in retreat
> That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great
> Publish each healer that in city lives
> Or country houses at the end of drives ;
> Harrow the house of the dead ; look shining at
> New styles of architecture, a chage of heart.

The poem is, in fact, a prayer more to something within a man than to any outside power or force. A 'change of heart' will enable a man to love himself, and then to love others. This change can be brought about by healers or teachers like Auden himself. The Poem fortifies our belief that man can build 'new styles of architecture' that is, a new Jerusalem if he sees the power and light within. This is Auden's typical poem as it highlights his belief in the possibility of reform in the individual as well as in the society. It also demonstrates Auden's belief in the healing powers of psychology and his didactic impulse.

But the means by which the individual and the society can be reformed, according to Auden, is "Love". In poem after poem he tries to convince his readers how 'Love' might form "the basis for an ethic." Auden was an atheist at this time but he set so much store by Love. What is exactly means by

'Love' is not very clear in the beginning, for he means different things at different times, but the reason for this could be that besides the psychologists who made love the central point of their psychology, he was also coming under the influence of Karl Marx. To these two interpretations he added the intimations of his own creative imagination.

> The world is Love . . . .
> Surely one fearless kiss would cure
> The million fevers."

Thus 'Love' stood for Auden primarily as a healing power. He believed that Love is present in all human beings but it finds itself only in a community—it is "the flood on which all move and wish to move." Apart from the biological urge towards cooperation, it is also the source of all that is 'lucid' and 'civilized'. Hoggart suggests that Auden's concept of love has something in common with Bergson's theory of creative evolution and Shaw's theory of 'Life-Force'. But it considers self-love as bad and destructive. The 'cure' can be brought about only by selfless love :

> "What you can self-forgetfully love,
> You can cure."

But the self is important; it should not be lost or merged in the community for

> "Every eye must weep alone
> Till I will be overthrown
> . . . .
> Then all I's can meet and grow;
> I Am become I Love,
> I Have Not I Am Loved
> Then all I's can meet and grow."

The central thing about 'Love' and the reason why Auden made it the 'burden of his song' is that it is the 'first need of our natures'. One will find it in unmeasured stores in the bosoms of others; one has only to look for it. After one finds it, one must nourish and develop it :

> "O can you see precisely in our gaucheness
> The neighbour's strongest wish, to serve and love".

As Auden gained maturity, his concept of Love also became clearer and bolder. He made it into a scheme of action and left it a scientific and social discipline—more complex and profound than either that of Freud ar Marx.

But though Auden laid so much emphasis on Love, his approach to poetry was anti-romantic. In his earliest poetry there are some traces of romanticism, but as he matured as a poet, he became more and more anti-romantic. He grew to believe that a poet should be a moralist and preach directly to the people through his poems. The reason why he insisted on adopting a didactic tone even to the extent of being harsh and bitter is clear from a speech he delivered before the Buchamite Group at Oxford 1934. Criticizing the appeal of this group to unthinking people, Auden observed ;

"Today the light which has been shed by Freud and Marx on the motivation of thought makes it criminal to be uncritical; and no movement secular or religious which is afraid to examine dispassionately and acknowledge openly what self-interest would make it want to believe, is worthy of anything but contempt."

It is not surprising, therefore, that Auden wanted his readers to have a similar critical self awareness. He also tried to make the reader conscious of his involvement with existing personal and social problems. This could best be done by rising above one's immediate environment like an 'airman'. Almost all the poems of the 1930 volume carry this exhortation to the reader, yet is best illustrated by poem xxix :

Consider this and in our time
As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman:
The clouds rift suddenly—look there
At cigarette-end smouldering on a border
At the first garden party of the year.
Pass on, admire the view of the massif
Through plate-glass windows of the sports Hotel;
Join there the insufficient units
Dangerous, easy, in furs, in uniform
And constellated at reserved tables
Supplied with feelings by an efficient band

Relayed elsewhere to farmers and their dogs
Sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens.

Auden's social commitments, his feeling of being bound to his times, and a desire to improve the lot of the common man through his art were the motivating forces during the early phase of his poetic career. Other poets of the thirties had a similar feeling of commitment and a similar desire to contribute usefully to their times. They all wished to use their art for the service of society. Eliot had shown the way how the medium of poetry could be used for highlighting the dilemmas of the modern man and the conditions in which he lived. The thirties were an unusual time of depression and social unrest. The writers of this decade got so involved with their time that their art became committed and their tone didactic. They were fired with a missionary zeal which gave a particulur colouring to their art. Auden had more political awareness than either Day Lewis or Stephen Spender, and hence his early works have a political bias. But it would be wrong to call him a political poet, for the direct political content of his work during the thirties is not much or very significant. Even *The Orators* (1932) which contains a lot of Marxian philosophy cannot be called a political work as it is not inspired so much by Marx as by Jung, Groddeck and Layard.

THE ORATORS (1932)

The Orators was written by Auden when he was only twenty-five. Though an amalgam of verse and prose, it is a brilliant piece. But it is not easy to understand. Repeated readings do not yield much result. This is a serious drawback which mars this otherwise fascinating work. It is dedicated to Stephen Spender. Monroe K. Spears thinks that dedication to Spender seems to be an oblique apology for private references, and perhaps also for differing with Spender's view of the propagandist function of poetry :

Private faces in public places
Are wiser and nicer
Than public faces in private places."

Fut the obscurity of *The Orators* is perhaps the secret of its

popularity, as the reader feels tentalized to discover its hidden meaning. It is also perhaps a way of saying, as onecr itic remarks, "that the present state of things doesn't make sense, that jokes and false beards are the only proper reaction; it is a means of expressing revolt against the rational mind and the solemn plausibilities of the world." Whatever the meaning Auden had in mind, it is clear that in the first book the author is concerned with the search for a hero or saviour but he makes fun of both the search for a political leader and the search for a secular saviour. The second book presents an airman who is not a pure hero set against the villains of the first book, but a middle class intellectual trying to usher in the Marxist revolution and eliminate the bourgeois class of which he himself is a member. He is called the airman as he is committed to destroying man's bonds with the earth. In the present society, as it is, he feels completely isolated like his creator. The Airman is physically isolated from the confusion and disorder of the life on earth but from above he can look at the earth in a much more detached way than if he were personally involved in it. His emotional detachment gives him the clinical quality which he wanted his poetry to have.

The third book has six odes which might be described as the airman's public utterances which odes are in the traditional sense. He appears like a bourgeois schoolmaster planning to destroy the values for which the school exists.

The Orators is in fact a fantasy. The reader does not take long to discover that he is in a world of poetic exageration. The surrealistic dream imagery completes the impression of fantasy. The figure of the Airman becomes a symbol of the forces for liberation.

Auden might have got his inspiration for this work from Blake whose *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* had impressed him greatly. We find in *The Orators* a similar war launched on frustration and fear, and a similar fight for liberation and and energy, an exhortation to the people not to ignore the call of their feelings. *The Orators* expresses Auden's feeling as a political reformer, namely, that almost anything will be a product of the enemy and therefore bad; that all the relics of the past were good once but now are to be discarded, and that almost anything will be an earnest of better things, a pioneer

of the future. *The Orators* has sometimes been described as "a political manifesto." Anthony Thwaite calls it "a journal of personal obsessions." It is the consequence of his anxiety to reform society and better the lot of the common man.

Though Auden has mixed prose and verse in *The Orators*, the prose is 'creative' and much of it is highly poetic. Though a remarkable work in many respects, Auden described it as "a fair notion, fatally injured."

LOOK STRANGER (1936)

Look Stranger had earlier been titled *On This Island.* It consists of 32 poems. While the poems in the 1930 volume were generally obscure and 'tricksy', the poems in this volume have greater intelligibility. Auden wrote these poems when the Marxist influence on him was at its height. But many critics believe that his poetic power were also at their peak at this time. Whether one may agree with it or not, there is no doubt about it that the direct political content of this volume is no more than that of *Poems 1930.*

The title poem in this volume is an excellent poem of natural description. The human element which was so important to Auden comes only at the end, and some may even find it out of place. This poem is a very bold experiment in creating a perfect harmony between sound and sense, and movement and mood. It presents the picture of England in turmoil but it also declares it strong as a 'fortress'. The rest of the poems in this volume also refer to the crisis in England. In fact, it is this theme which unifies this collection. As the original title of this volume *On This Island* indicates, most of the poems here refer to, broadly speaking, two main kinds of escape from life—religion and romantic love. But Auden considers both these means as basically selfish and not in the larger interests of society. This is the Marxist view that Auden takes, but this does not constitute the central theme of this volume. Auden's main concern in these poems is to trace all the present evils in society and in the individual to the absence of love. He, therefore, suggests that we should learn to love and banish hatred from our minds if we want the society and individual relations to come out of the morass in which they are.

The meaning of 'Love' in this volume is a little different

from what it was in the early poetry when Auden was more under the influence of Freud who interpreted Love as Eros. something "including both ego- and object-love, the urge to self-preservation and the preservation of the species, as well as sexual love." Death wish or destructive instinct (Thanatos) is the enemy of Eros which is good and therefore honest people obey Eros. Disobedience and disloyalty to Eros are the central theme of the early poems.

Look Stranger introduces a distinction between 'Love' and 'Eros'. Eros is now considered bad, because it is selfish and crooked, and Love is described as "unselfish and social, not natural but the result of effort and discipline." Sexual Love, which Auden once described as "whisper in the double bed", is dismissed as selfish. Though the tone of the *Look Stranger* is extremely pessimistic, its sale was three or four times more than that of any of Auden's earlier volumes and it put the seal on Auden's reputation.

Letters From Iceland (1937)

Auden published his next volume, *Letters from Iceland* after his return from Iceland which he had visited with Louis MacNeice during 1936-37. This volume gives us a lot of odd and interesting information about Iceland, about Louis Mac Neice and about himself. We also learn from it Auden's views regarding the poet's place and purpose in society. He tells us that the poet belongs to the whole of society, and is not, or should not be, a solitary antic condemned to a secluded life. The poet has a duty to put up a fight against those forces which force him into isolation. One year later he put the same idea more explicitly in his Introduction to the *Oxford Book of Light Verse*. He argued that the greatest poetry was written in the Elizbethan times when the artist "was sufficiently rooted in the life of his age to feel in common with his audience, and at the same time society was in a sufficient state of flux for the age long beliefs and attitudes to be no longer compulsive on the artist's vision."

The monumental thing in this volume is the "Letter to Lord Byron"—the title poem. According to Monroe K. Spears it is Auden's "most sustained and successful piece of light verse—a historical anamoly, a unique *tour de force*." In this poem

Auden makes detailed observations on modern life and literature. He also gives us a complete and accurate account of his background, family, education and career. It is highly entertaining but never trivial. Towards the end, he defends himself against the charge that he did not provide a solution to the problems he had highlighted by saying that "no man by himself has life's solution." He concludes by making a few observations about the condition of his country now in "crisis and dismay", and places Byron in Hell rather than Heaven :

> For Heaven gets all the lookers for her pains
> But Hell, I think, gets nearly all the brains.

The Letter to Lord Byron imitates Byron's *ottava rima* and, as Richard Hoggart writes, Auden has caught "Byron's Jauntiness and facetiousness" and used similarly "invocation, parenthesis, a wide, idiomatic and often superficial sweep and the emphatic close on the final couplet".

JOURNEY TO A WAR

Auden's next volume, *Journey to a War* written in collaboration with Isherwood, and dedicated to E. M. Forster, was published in March 1939. It is a travel book about the war in China. Auden's contribution to this volume was only two sections : Section I has "London to Hongkong" which serves as a sort of introduction to this volume, "The Voyage" and five sonnets. Section II consists of a sonnet sequence called "In Time of War," and a commentary on the sonnets which gives us an insight into the poet's ideas during this period of transition. He tells us that we are in a brilliant capsule survey of history, passing through the third great period of disappointment : the first was classical civilization, the second was the middle Ages and third our own dualism between mind and body, isolation of the self in an indifferent universe which has been made worse by machines and industries. The poem concludes with the voice of man asking how "to outgrow my madness."

The Sonnet sequence consisting of 27 sonnets shows Auden under Rilke's influence. He has successfully adopted Rilke's kind of sonnet and can write like him with almost no effort. In fact, he has achieved a great mastery over this form. The

main points of similarity between Auden's sonnets and Rilke's are : (1) clear symbolisation in landscape and incident of abstract problems otherwise difficult to express. (2) unheralded jump into the narrative which requires the reader to pick up the legend as he goes along. (3) air of quiet control, unhurried and largely unrhetorical assurance of tone which comes mainly from having firm symbols to manipulate."

Rilke's influence is noticeable in *On This Island* too, but here it becomes more pervasive. The dedicatory sonnet to E. M. Forster is one of the portrait type that has now become well-known. Of the "London to Hongkong" sonnets, the first, "The Sphinx" bears close resemblance to the unicorn sonnets of Rilke. "Macao" and "Hongkong" are portraits of places. Auden tried this type again in his next volume *Another Time*.

ANOTHER TIME (1940)

Another Time has three divisions : (a) People and Places, (b) Lighter Poems which include ballads, cabaret songs, etc. and (c) Occasional Poems which include elegies on W. B. Yeats, Sigmund Freud and Toller, "Spain 1937", "September 1, 1939" and 'Epithalamion". "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" and "Herman Melville" are fine examples of literary criticism in poetry, but they also analyze the problems these writers were confronted with in their lives as artists. Auden takes the view that by transforming suffering into art, man can rise above his problems and sorrows and find peace and contentment. Joseph Warren Beach suggests that in these poems "Auden is most perfectly himself and least the performer" and that they are "earnest, direct and manly in their rendering of the poet's sentiments."

"Spain 1937" is Auden's most well-known political poem. It shows remarkable objectivity and power of selection and seeks to establish a close connection between people's personal troubles and the political scene. Its central thesis is contained in the following observation Auden made in his Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue* a couple of years earlier :

"Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more

clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice."

"September 1, 1939" is another very well-known poem. Auden wrote it after the outbreak of the second world war which provoked him into composing it. He now loses his faith in the cures he had suggested earlier. Marxism no longer holds him in sway. History also seems to him a greater betrayer. He feels that there is no one to lead the people out of the darkness that has engulfed them, finds himself lonely and longs for company. This may be said to be the voice of his middle period when he could no longer speak with the faith with which he spoke earlier.

Another Time bears the stamp of Auden's American experience particularly in its use of conversational language, but it includes some poems which he had written in England. His epigrammatic manner applied to individuals earlier reaches its peak in *Another Time.* Richard Hoggart remarks that since Auden's manner of writing here is essentially relaxed, "it has sometimes encouraged Auden's characteristic technical faults, and so has become slipshod rather than relaxed, slick instead of laconic, informedly glib rather than finely allusive. "But one must remember that *Another Time* marks the transition from the early Auden to the later Auden and clearly indicates the change in his moral attitude. It gives us a foretaste of the manner Auden is going to adopt both in his themes and technique. Besides, it has some distinctive qualities too as it contains some of his most discursive and reflective poetry.

We find an astonishing variety of tone in Auden's poems of the first phase of his poetic career. He was keen to address himself to an audience, but actually he addresses himself to several possible audiences. He could not sustain an attitude for long, and did not quite know how the minds of the audience worked if they were listening at all. This lack of confidence comes between a poet's thought and expression and leads to a cynical attitude which in turn gives an ironical tone to his writings. Auden uses a lot of irony to make up for his lack of confidence. Irony also suits the kind of verse he writes and, where it does not seem to him enough for his purposes, he uses direct method and often talks at the reader using an openly

didactic tone. Often his voice is affected by the crisis and dismay of the time and becomes clearly the 'voice of doom'.

Auden's early verse is often careless, but not shoddy. He was both witty and humorous but was very much preoccupied with social and political issues, and this has left its mark on his verse

> What do you think of England,
> This country where no one is well

Auden was very fond of experimenting with forms. Consequently, he experimented with a large variety of styles ranging from the prose of Henry James to the nursery rhymes of Edward Lear. Monroe K. Spears has attempted a general characterization of Auden's early style which may be summed up as follows :

The first charactersitic of early style is the detached, clinical, objective attitude, with modern scientific imagery as in the following lines of a poem included in the 1928 volume but not in *Poems 1930*.

> Consider if you will how lovers stand
> In brief adherance, straining to preserve
> Too long the suction of good-bye : others,
> Less clinically-minded, will admire
> An evening like a coloured photograph,
> A music stultified across the water.

The second characterstic is his technical virtuosity—an astounding variety in meter and stanza. The third is the closeness to dream, riddle, the non-logical and subconscious both in the ellipsis of grammatical and logical connectives and in the images. Lastly, there is the frequent obscurity, resulting not from ellipsis of connectives but from lack of any discoverable connections among images or statements, from excessive privacy of reference or associations, from uncertainty as to who is speaking and what is going on.

The 1928 Poems employ a variety of styles. Of these, the most striking is the one which characterizes *Paid on Both Sides* and which in its fully developed form may be called The Nordic Mask. This is the product of his hearing old English opetry read to him by J. R. R. Tolkien at Oxford, and the

Sagas in which he had been keenly interested. Another style employed in these poems is the use of short lines of two or three stresses and emotionally charged abstractions in what has been called "the clipped lyric." Here we see the influence of Anglo-Saxon verse as well as that of Skelton with his irregular two- to five-stress tumbling meter and eccentric rhyming.

The third variety of style may be called the conversational or the colloquial or the middle style. The best example of this style is the following poem :

This peace can last no longer than the storm
Which started it ; the shower wet and warm,
The careless striding through the clinging grass
Perceiving nothing, these will surely pass.
When heart and ear-drums are no longer dinned
By shouting air. As surely as the wind
Will bring a lark song from the cloud, not rain,
Shall I know the meaning of lust again ;
Nor sunshine on the weir's unconscious roar
Can change whatever I might be before.
I know it, yet for this brief hour or so
I am content, unthinking and aglow ;
Made one with horses and with workmen, all
Who seek for shelter by a dripping wall,
Or labour in the fields with mist and cloud
And slant rain hiding them as in a shroud.

The fourth variety of style may be called high ; it is 'florid, extravagant, elevated, profuse ; usually it is written in long lines, and often exhibits baroque incongruities of diction', as in the following lines

Bones wrenched, weak whimper, lids wrinkled, first dazzle know,
World-wonder hardened as bigness, years, brought knowledge, you,
Presence a rich mould augured for roots urged, but gone,
The soul is tetanous : gun-barrel burnishing
In summer grass mind lies to tarnish......

The last variety used is the Rilkean Sonnet. He must have learnt writing his sonnets in the manner of Rilke through Hardy, Robinson and Robert Frost who were his favourite poets and who had used this form with considerable success. The device that Auden borrows from Rainer Maria Rilke is "that of putting unidentified persons, indicated only by pronouns (he, she, they), is usually symbolic landscapes, with the sonnet beginning in the middle of an unexplained dramatic situation. At its best the technique makes possible a fresh union of abstract and concrete, of generalization about life and particular example ; at its worst, the oblique and riddling approach which is a necessary part of the technique leads to nothing but hopeless obscurity. The best example is the following sonnet retained in *Poems 1930*.

Control of the passes was, he saw, the key
To this new district, but who would get it ?
He, the trained spy, had walked into the trap
For a bogus guide, seduced with old tricks.

At Greenhearth was a fine site for a dam
And easy power, had they pushed the rail
Some stations nearer. They ignored his wires.
The bridges were unbuilt and trouble coming.

The street music seemed gracious now to one
For weeks up in the desert. Woken by water
Running away in the dark, he often had
Reproached the night for a companion
Dreamed of already. They would shoot of course,
Parting easily who were never joined.

Some critics make sharp distinctions between these various styles and argue that they actually belong to different phases of his life, but the truth is that all of them were present from the very beginning and can also be seen in his later works.

The twenty one new poems added in *Poems 1930* employ some more devices. One of them is the introduction of a *persona* (the chief figure) who does not speak but is spoken to. These poems present a political-psychological analysis in a new style which has been called the popular style. The language of popular songs and speech is used for satirical effect, and the

persona speaks the poem. Auden might have found his inspiratian for this style from Brecht whose plays he had seen, and theatre songs which he had heard, during his visit to Germany. A variety of popular style is the nursery rhyme or folk ballad and this can be seen in the following lines of the 1928 volume:

> Amoeba in the running water
> Lives afresh in son and daughter
> "The sword above the valley"
> Said the Warm to the Penny.

This style is developed further in the new poems added to the 1930 volume, but comes to full bloom in the later poems.

Thus, as Stephen Spender writes in *World Within World*, Auden's early poetry gives the impression of an "intellectual game". "It is a game," he continues, "of impartial objectivity about catastrophe; wars, revolutions, violence, hatreds, loves, and all the forces which move through human lives." But his ideas changed strikingly. In the beginning his greatest interest was psychology, but this was absorbed into his new interest—Marxism, and at least until 1936, his idealogy was strongly Marxian. This again was given up in favour of liberal humanism when he began to realise that this real enemy of society was not the bourgeois (as Marxism had taught) but the totalitarian state which deprived the individual of the freedom of thought and expression. This led Auden to declare a war against Fascism on an international scale. After 1939 his secular Fascism gradually gave way to the Christian belief that his ideal was not attainable on earth, but only in Heaven. This paved the way for his return to Christianity, a firm and unshakeable faith in which characterizes his later work.

2

THE LATER AUDEN

Auden left for the United States of America on January 18, 1939 and settled down in New York, much to the chagrin of British poets and critics. It was said that he got disgusted with the conditions in England during the 'thirties and felt that he could give a new direction to his art by staying away from England. Cyril Connolly reports Auden's conversation with him in 1947 : "He reverts always to the same argument, that a writer needs complete anonymity, he must break away from the European literary happy family...and he must reconsider all the family values." Auden used to say that "aloneness is man's real condition," and American literature, he believed is "a literature of lonely people." He further explained why he preferred America to England :

"The attractiveness of America to a writer is its openness and lack of tradition . . . . There is no past. No tradition. No roots—that is, in the European sense . . . . But what is happening here is happening everywhere. The general effect of the trends of machinery has been to de-root people . . . . With history moving so fast, people are so afraid ! People feel, what is the permanent thing ?"

New York, being a most representative city from the point of view of modern culture and civilization, perhaps was just the place for Auden, for here, as he wrote

> More even than in Europe
> The choice of patterns is made clear
> Which the machine imposes, what
> Is possible and what is not,
> To what conditions we must bow
> In building the Just City now.

Auden's writings in America, whether it is poems, essays, articles, reviews or anything else, are characterized by a deep

sense of religion. His inspiration now comes from Kierkegaard, the existentialist philosopher and Neibuhr, the theologian, just as it came from Freud and Marx in the early phase. Both Kierkegaard and Neibuhr were deeply involved with such metaphysical issues as the suffering of the individual soul, the importance of moral choice and the nature of sin. Auden's writings now refer repeatedly to these issues. Thus his themes now move closer to Christianity as they had moved away from it in the 1930s. He becomes deeply pre-occupied with man's moral dilemma, the nature of Love and the social implications of his faith.

But Auden's return to Christianity was not as sudden as it appears. If one goes through his early poems carefully, one will find prayers, invocations and admissions of humility before an unknown God. He persistently called for a 'change of heart' and emphasized the need for love:

"We must love one another or die"

He drew people's attention to the fact that their earthly communities will remain incomplete without love. We should, therefore, usher in a society.

"Whose form is truth, whose content Love"

In America Auden published three long poems—"New Year Letter", "The Sea and the Mirror" and "For the Time Being." "New Year Letter" was later published along with a sonnet sequence in a volume called *New Year Letter* in England and *The Double Man* in America in 1941. The other two long poems were published together in a volume entitled *For the Time Being* in 1944. All the three long poems were subsequently published in *Collected Poetry* (1945).

New Year Letter

The little poem of this volume is a kind of explanation to the people who considered Auden's migration to America during the time of war as a kind of defection. Some critics call it a discourse and place it between Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and a metaphysical treatise. In fact, Auden is trying to evolve in this poem a system of belief which could put a stop to war. He personally believed that Christianity was the ultimate solution but he does not say it directly. His

search is for a system which could replace the existing systems. Seeking is the important thing in this volume, not only in "The Quest" sonnet-sequence where the title makes it clear, but also in the "Letter." In fact this is the theme of almost all of his later poetry, for he cannot rest content until he finds "the Just City" mentioned in the lines quoted above. The American title *The Double Man* is more meaningful, as it points to the divided consciousness of man and the conflict between freedom and necessity which continues to be Auden's main preoccupation in his later work.

"New Year Letter" has three parts which correspond to Kierkegaard's three categories of the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Part I begins by asserting that our guilt and sin which we are always trying to forget are always present in the disorder which engulfs us. It ends on the note that we ignore all the moral and human values and allow violence to take their place. John Fuller considers this part "little more than a poetic apologia."

Part II dwells at length on the role of the Devil in human behaviour. By taking possession of the intellect which is the nerve-centre of tne human being, the Devil misleads us into asserting that we are more than human and that we need not die for our sins. Ignoring our intuition is disastrous but the Devil creates that attitude in us. Auden quotes Pascal to strengthen his position in the 'Notes' which are as long as the 'Letter', and which have often been compared to Eliot's Notes on *The Waste Land*. But they bear greater resemblance to Pope's notes to the *Dunciad*.

Part III is the longest and deals with a variety of topics ranging from history, political theory, social science, philosophy and theology to the description of America. Prof. J. W. Beach was so much impressed by this poem that he thought it would be "an ideal starting for a university course in the Humanities or the Philosophy of Religion."

In the end Auden makes an appeal to God whom he first sees as a unicorn (which is a traditional christian image) which is the first step from doubt to belief in the Almighty. "New Year Letter" thus, is a poem in which the poet is trying to teach himself to believe. But it would not be proper to call it a religious poem. It is, as Hoggart puts it, "an argument in verse, per-

ceptive, careless, suggestive, bookish, vivid, almost everywhere competent, and in places brilliant and moving." Its central theme is the conflict in man's will but it is viewed in the larger context of the society as a whole.

It is a long poem of more than 1,700 lines and is written in rhyming tetrameter. It shows the influence of Samuel Butler, Dryden and Pope. The meter Auden employs here had been used by Browning before, but Auden uses it with greater freedom. It is the best of his three long poems.

"The Quest" sonnets were first published by *New Republic* in November 1940 with the following prefatory note :

"The theme of the Quest occurs in fairy tales, legends like the Golden Fleece and the Holy Grail, boys' adventure stories and detective novels. These poems are reflections upon certain features common to them all. The 'He' and 'They' referred to should be regarded as both objective and subjective."

Auden intended the Quest sonnets (twenty in all) to be an account of a personal search for the unknown which has always remained a mystery to man and which alone can give true happiness. The Quest sonnets have sometimes been called Auden's spiritual autobiography.

The influence of Rilke is very obvious here. But other influences at work are Freudian psychology and Kierkegaardian religious analysis. Though the focus keeps on changing, it keeps coming back to Christianity.

The Epilogue is the best thing in *New Year Letter*, for it does not have the defects either of the "Letter" which is a little too, intellectual, nor of "The Quest" which looks too much like the work of a conscious artist. It is also more successful in communicating the author's personal faith at which he has just arrived. It has greater dignity, more intensity, and points out more emphatically the need for humility and striving in the face of violence and death. The most important thing about the Epilogue is that it is finally free from the 'misery of doubt', as the author now becomes finally committed to Christianity :

> That the orgulous spirit may while it can
> Conform to its temporal focus with praise,
> Acknowledging the attributes of

One immoral one infinite substance,
And the shabby structure of indolent flesh
Give a resonant echo to the word which was
From the beginning, and the shining
Light be comprehended by the darkness.

This volume thus shows Auden's spiritual progress and his final acceptance of the Christian faith.

FOR THE TIME BEING (1945)

Auden's next volume *For the Time Being* was dedicated to his mother who died in 1941. It contains two long poems "The Sea and the Mirror" and "For the Time Being". "For the Time Being" sub-titled "A Christmas Oratorio" was written between 1941 and 1942 and "The Sea and the Mirror" was written a couples of years after, roughly between 1942 and 1944. "For the Time Being" continues the argument of "New Year Letter" and takes Auden closer to christianity. It follows the form of the Oratorio (which is a composition for choral singing, usually on a sacred theme) in everything but the musical setting for it is meant to be spoken or read. In fact the Oratorio form suits Auden better than the play as plot and characterization are not needed in it. Besides, in an oratorio the singers use only their voices and do not act, and hence the alienation effect is already present in it. The chorus mediate between the audience and the action. Auden has used the chorus more effectively here than in any of his plays.

"For the Time Being" is a true Christmas Oratorio as the reader is throughout conscious of all the three meanings a Christmas Oratorio is supposed to suggest : (1) the unique incarnation ; (2) the annual attempt in Christendom to apprehend and experience the event as the centre of the Christian year; and (3) the constant attempt of Christians to understand, make viable and in some sense respect the Incarnation in their daily lives.

The Auden's Oratorio has nine sections, most of which correspond to the traditional division of the nativity story in the church festivals and the medieval drama. In the first section 'Advent', the chorus and the semi-chorus describe the despair and deadness of the ancient world before the birth of Christ.

The pagans, they chant, face the void ; Fear and Doubt seep everywhere :

> Darkness and snow descend
> On all personality.

The second section "the Annunciation" personifies the four faculties of man—Intuition, Sensation, Feeling and Thought in the manner of the Morality plays. They were one before the Fall, but have become dissociated since then, and hence, man now lacks a wholeness of personality which he must try to regain if he is to 'extemporize' life.

The third section, 'The Temptation of St. Joseph', begins in the vein of the music-hall or popular song. Joseph is made an ordinary man who is plagued by doubts about Mary's purity.

> Mary may be pure
> But, Joseph are you sure

The Narrator condemns the attitude of the person who would not believe without safe assurances. The choruses then develop the general theme of this section—the temptation not to trust God. The semi-chorus concludes this section by exhorting Joseph and Mary to pray for the various types of sinners. The change of manner from the chorus to the narrator is deliberately done to suggest a variety of approaches to the problem.

The fourth section, "The Summons" presents a contrast between human wisdom and Christian revelation. The Three Wise Men are summoned to face the truth. They realize that they are three old sinners and so want to know 'how to be human'. The star advises them to have faith. This section comes to a close with a prayer in chorale form to God for help and therefore, forms the dramatic climax of the poem.

The fifth section 'The Vision of the Shepherds' summons the shepherd like the Wise Men in the preceding section. They are the representatives of the common man but they never despair and so wait for the Good News. This Good News as announced by the Chorus of Angles is the truth of Love which will now rule the world in place of Authority.

The sixth section "At the Manager" begins with Mary singing a tender Lullaby to the new born child predicting that

her human flesh in the child will bring him anxiety, fear, sorrow and death. This is followed by the song of the wise men and the shepherds contrasting the paths by which they came to truth. The section comes to an end with their address to the child in the person of that 'Love' which the wise men had discovered is "more serious than philosophy".

The seventh section "The Mediation of Simeon" takes us to the philosophical meaning of the Incarnation as opposed to Love in the preceding section. This is the best exposition of Auden's religious views at this time which were deeply influenced by Neibuhr. Simeon talks about the various attitudes to the Fall and affirms that the WORD will be made Flesh only after man's sense of sin is complete because then the unknown will not be something to be feared.

Simeon speaks in prose (used for the first time in the Oratorio) but he speaks energetically and idiomatically. He is the type of the Christian convert and intellectual and he resembles Auden in this as also in the fact that to both of them Truth came late but with great consolation.

The eighth section "The Massacre of the Innocents presents Herod who is both the historical character and the liberal of the late 1930s fighting the threats of war and fascism by restoring law and order. But now he is a proud rationalist confronted with the Irrational which is the greatest threat to his rule of law. He, therefore, decides to take the help of the military to protect this reward of his hard labour. Herod symbolises a man who cannot bring himself to believe without sufficient proof. Clinging to reason alone, he cries with despair that he cannot destroy God by not believing. The soldiers speak next, pointing out that the implication or the consequences of Herod's decision would be the massacre of the innocents.

The ninth and the last section "The Flight into Egypt" presents Joseph and Mary hearing the voices of the Desert which tempt them to stay in the world, as they are crossing it and looking into the mirror which symbolizes the Journey of faith. But they only remark that insecurity is the condition natural to humanity.

Thus the short vision comes to an end and we return to our life in the modern world without having changed much, though things are not quite the same, for

To those who have seen
The child, however dimly, however incredulously,
The Time Being is, in a sense , the mast crying time
of all."

We still like to pray for temptation and suffering so that we may be saved. The soul knows that "God will cheat no one, not even the world of its trumph." This exciting conclusion is followed by the anti-climactic observations of the chorus which conclude the Oratorio: "He is the way—the Truth—the Light" —and "Follow him through the Land of Unlikeness,..... Seek him in the kingdom of Anxiety,......Love him in the World of the Flesh."

"For the Time Being" thus describes the time from Christ's Advent to the Flight into Egypt, and the setting is Palestine. The Oratorio has been quite popular and has been frequently performed by religious groups. Monroe K. Spears thinks that it is a brilliant piece : "Considered on its own terms, and at this distance in time, the work ("For the Time Being") may be seen as a unique and remarkable success both formally and as a whole." Prof Beach, however, is of the opinion that it is "perhaps the least successful of Auden's larger creative efforts." But the fact that Auden included the whole of it in *Collected Poetry* shows that he rated it highly.

THE SEA AND THE MIRROR

"The Sea and the Mirror" has the sub-title "A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*". Here Auden is trying to explore the relationship of the Mirror of Art to the Sea of Life. The framework of *The Tempest* provided him a structure in which he could show the relationship and interaction of ideas better than had been possible in the straight sequence of the Quest Sonnets. Thus, although in the sub-title Auden claims to suggest a new interpretation of *The Tempest*, he is actually using the structure of the play "as a common ground upon which to build new ideas."

The poem has three sections. In the first section, Prospero prepares to leave the Island and so sets Ariel free. The symbolism indicates Auden's belief that his spiritual quest will take him beyond the realm of art. In the second section, the rest of the characters are returning in a ship to Italy. They are

celebrating their regeneration by addressing each other and the audience. They symbolise the return from the world of the play to the world of reality. In the third section, Caliban addresses the audience directly about his own role and the role of Ariel, and spells out the relation between the world of art and the world of reality. It is a very long address, covering about half of the total length but a brilliant one.

In the Preface, the stage manager addressing himself to the critics tells them that art is concerned with life but it does not explain its surprise and mystery. It can only evoke emotion through presentation of the human dilemma. He adds that religion does not need the help of art. Finally, he suggests that the world on the other side of the footlights is also illusory :

> All the rest is silence
> On the other side of the wall ;
> And the silence ripeness,
> And the ripeness all.

"Prospero to Ariel" begins by outlining the basic terms on which the unknown must be approached. It is man's creative imagination which comes in the way of his coming to terms with reality. Hence, Prospero renounces his art. In doing so he is renouncing the aesthetic for the religious, as Kierkegaard would put it. "The supporting Cast, Sotto Voce" presents the rest of the characters telling us, each in his own verse form, about their experiences on the island and how they intend to pursue their destinies. Antonio, the villain of the play and the only unchanged person dominates this part. He represents man's freedom to create disorder which the artists may understand and give expression to. The dramatic tension comes from Antonio's speech and his ironical view of the other characters.

Alonso's speech is the most poetic of all speeches in this section.

The last section "Caliban to the Audience "is a prose disquisition in the style of Henry James. During the course of his long speech, Caliban puts on three masks. In the first he asks Shakespeare on behalf of the audience why he introduced Caliban in *The Tempest* at all. The parody of Jamesian tone suits him very well. The second part of the speech is Shakespeare's answer to young poets who have Ariels at their beck and call.

In the third part he speaks for himself and Ariel to the audience. He brings them face to face with the choices they must make in real life. By presenting the various alternatives, he points to the dilemma which every artist faces. The artist, Caliban observes, is concerned not with art *versus* life but with both *versus* the Divine. The artist cannot portray both divine truth and man's condition of estrangement from it. Auden has presented the dilemma but not the solution, except in some 'unforeseen mishap'. The final image is that of the world as a stage but it is rendered mock-heroic : "life is the greatest grand opera rendered by a very provincial touring company indeed."

Many critics have described "The Sea and the Mirror" as Auden's masterpiece, but many others find it extremely irritating. There is no doubt that it is a puzzling piece as it is technically the most complicated of all of Auden's work. But it can be grasped better by treating it as a drama. Prof Gerald Nelson considers it "a modern sequel to *The Tempest*." But he adds that it is "perhaps closer to Brecht than to Shakespeare, for its dramatic effect depends to a great extent upon the relationship of the audience to the drama. The audience must participate in 'The Sea and the Mirror,' and the movement of the poem from section to section is dependent upon this participation."

"The Sea and the Mirror" marks the turning point in Auden's career, for now he renounces the use of art as magic. But it displays Auden's technical accomplishment as each character speaks in a different form—ballad, villanelle, sestina, sapphics, elegiacs, terza rima, syllabic verse and the prose style of Henry James. Besides, it contains some of Auden's finest poetry. Prof. Beach also considers it the best of the three long poems.

The Age of Anxiety (1947)

The Age of Anxiety was published in 1947, though almost half of it had been written by 1945. Auden is as much preoccupied here with the problem of form as in the three long poems. He has not quite succeeded in finding a form for this poem but its sub-title, "A Baroque Eclogue," suggests, as Spears puts it, "the extravagance of form through which Auden attains distance and indirection." An Eclogue is a short

pastoral poem but here the setting is a bar and hence, the pastoral imagery is only ironic.

"The Age of Anxiety consists of six parts—a dirge, a masque, the Seven Ages of Man, the seven stages, and the poet tries to hold them together, though with little success. It has almost all the equipments of an Eclogue—the dramatic form with dialogue, the singing contest, elegy, love songs and laments, with courtship of a shepherdess, a dirge, formal, artificial diction and meter. Auden uses the old English meter with its alliterative line and four heavy stresses which he had used occasionally during the thirties and in "The Time Being" for the Voices of Desert to create a mock-heroic effect.

In this poem too as in "For the Time Being", four different characters represent four different faculties to indicate that man's personality has become fragmented and consequently lost its wholeness. The four characters—Malin, Rosetta, Quant and Emble—represent thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation respectively. All of them are engaged in a quest within themselves in their desire to gain spiritual knowledge, but in vain, as their urge comes not from within but from without. They all attempt to escape our age of anxiety and the poem is a satire on their attempt. John Fuller remarks that the spiritual theme is subservient to the psychological and this emphasis links the poem firmly with earlier works like *The Orators*. Since Rosetta (Feeling) leads the others in the journey through the unconscious in the third part, she is the most important character of the poem.

The Prologue introduces the characters in their private reveries. They become only gradually aware of their role in the present but they do not like to discuss war symbolism which becomes predominant. Instead, they discuss the topics stated by Malin as the most important, namely, man's constant attempt to escape guilt, anxiety and fear.

The second part, "The Seven Ages" gives a psychological interpretation to Shakespeare's seven stages of man's life. Malin introduces each stage and the other characters describe their experiences. The theme is the loss of innocence. The verse of this section is the best in the whole poem.

The third part, "The Seven Stages", is a parody—Quest for the lost innocence in which Rosetta serves as a guide. But the

members of the group function as "a single organism" for they seek "that state of prehistoric happiness which, by human beings, can be imagined only in terms of a landscape bearing a symbolic resemblance to the human body." The six stages of their journey re-enact the Fall.

The fourth-part, "The Dirge", is probably an elegy for American President Roosevelt, but it is generalized into a mourning over the death of the secular law-givers who are Heroes of all Quests and the heroes of the city and who become a kind of God, "a semi-divine stranger with superhuman powers."

In the fifth part which is written in a deliberately pastoral mode, the Quest pattern is resumed. The attraction between Rosetta and Emble grows into sexual love. Malin and Quant urge them to cherish their illusion, but they cannot do so as all their illusions fail. Emble passes out and Rosetta renounces her dream and makes a long speech (full of many a Joycean pun and illusion) in which she laments that for her there is no escape from evil, insecurity and fate. She concludes her speech with the Hebrew prayer "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

This sixth part is called the "Epilogue" which consists of Malin's meditations on the nature of love and time. This means that although Rosetta (Feeling) may recognize the emotional need for God, it is really left to Malin (Intellect) to make the Christian choice. His long soliloquy clearly points to the central concern of this work, the conditional reasons, of man's anxiety. Since there is no possibility of man's redemption by depending solely on his own resources, christianity is the only hope. But he cannot think of any positive action. Hence, the poem ends on a note of despair. Prof. Nelon observes that *The Age of Anxiety* seems to be a dramatic amplication of Auden's earlier poem "September 1, 1939". Comparing the two poems he writes :

"In 'September 1, 1939', the bar appears to be a temporary stop, a place to rest and gain the strength necessary for the battle, much like Prospero's island. In the Age of Anxiety the bar is all there is. The time is one of real war, and the bar has become an end in itself, instead of merely a false stopping place. It offers the possibility of escape into illusion, it gives its custo-

mers the possibility of believing that things are not what they are, that life is not life. "The Sea and the Mirror" began with its characters about to leave the illusion of their island, about to enter into life ..In *The Age of Anxiety* any attempt to leave the island is hallucinatory, induced by liquor. The voyages of the characters are taking them further from life rather than drawing them deeper into it."

The Age of Anxiety has evoked very different opinions among critics. While Hoggart thinks that it is poetically a failure, and that the disappointment is greater after the expectations aroused by "The Sea and the Mirror" and "For the Time Being". Prof. John Fuller believes that, actually "*The Age of Anxiety* is rich not only in noble despair, but in a kind of inner glee and inventive response to the conditions of life which is the mark of great literature." John Bayley goes so far as to call *The Age of Anxiety*, "Auden's greatest achievement to date, and the one which best shows the true nature of his scope and talent." Perhaps Monroe K. Spears' opinion is the most balanced: "My own view is that *The Age of Anxiety* is almost as far from being Auden's best as it is from being his worst poem."

Between 1948 and 1957, although Auden wrote mostly operas and criticism, his shorter poems did not suffer. They appeared in several collections—*Nones* (1951), *The Shield of Achilles* (1955), *Homage to Clio* (1960) and *About the House* (1966). They contain his most impressive poetry from the point of view of tone and subject.

Nones has some of Auden's most beautiful songs and light verse. They are written in a colloquial style in which Auden achieves great excellence. The lyrics are, particularly, his finest achievement in this style. But *Nones* is only a transitional volume; it has no particular principle of organization. G. S. Fraser seems absolutely correct when he says that the title is intended to suggest "nonce", that is, this is poetry for the nonce, for the time being. But it gives a foretaste of what is to come in *The Shield of Achilles* and *Homage to Clio*.

Some of the poems in *Nones*, like the title poem "Nones" and "Prime" were reprinted as part of the sequence "Horae Canonica" in the next volume *The Shield of Achilles*. The second poem of *Nones* "In Praise of Limestone" uses two

devices which are used often in the later poems. These are the gentle ordinary personae and the unidentified other, usually addressed as "dear" or "my dear". Its theme and technique make it a forerunner of the "Bucolics" of *The Shield of Achilles.* Its tone and concerns often remind one of Horace. The picture of modern life that it presents is very different from that of Auden's last poem *The Age of Anxiety.* Man still is considered weak and ignorant but the feeling of hatred or contempt gives way to a sympathetic understanding. Stephen Spender rightly remarks that it is "a didactic poem which reaches far beyond the didactic. Instead of being a personal poem with a moral, it is a morality which reveals a person." This person is Auden's new persona. He is no more preaching as in his poems of the 'thirties or even in his longer poems. The persona of "In Praise of Limestone" does not try to lead as, for example, Caliban does in "The Sea and the Mirror" or Narrator in "For the Time Being" or Quant and Malin in *The Age of Anxiety.* He merely observes what is around him and does not even really judge. This attitude continues in the rest of the volume. "Ischia" written about the landscape of Ischia, the Mediterranean island where Auden spent his summers during 1948 and 1957, also shows the kind of poems that Auden would write later. He keeps on using landscape for representing the conditions of human life but his new landscape is a little different; man now asks no answers from it.

The Shield of Achilles (1955) is the most well-organized of all the volumes of Auden. It has three sections. The first section has a set of seven "Bucolics" which are not pastorals, strictly speaking, as they do not bring in shepherds or rural life, but are about man's relationship with nature in one particular way. Each of the 'Bucolics' deals with a natural force or object and the human qualities and attitudes it suggests. The seven 'Bucolics' develop Auden's myth of "psychic geography" and show his technical virtuosity as he uses different meters and stanzas for each one of them.

The second section "In Sunshine and in Shade" contains fourteen poems. These poems use different techniques but they are all concerned with the man-in-society or man as a social animal. The title poem "The Shield of Achilles" treats the

work of art as a mirror of life. As in Homer's *Iliad*, the shield symbolizes art or image of the human condition. The 'modern shield' is without any beauty or goodness, that is, the modern world is devoid of these things. The whole structure of this poem is based on the idea that without the Christian faith, the romance of the Homeric legend would become as ugly as the present world. This poem, therefore, gives us a warning like "Memorial City" and it succeeds where the "Memorial City" does not, as the didactic manner of the earlier poem is completely eschewed. Auden makes the reader see things for himself and draw his own conclusions.

The third section "Horae Canonica" has seven poems based on canonical hours, the Church's set times for prayer and meditation. The sequence begins with "Prime" and ends with "Lauds." This section is almost as complicated as *The Age of Anxiety*.

The "Horae Canonica" celebrates the crucifixion showing that although Christ was crucified only once, we kill him everyday. What Auden tries to do here is to use the crucifixion as an illustration of the fact that death comes to everyone born on earth. Auden wants us to understand that no one can escape death. In order that we may recognize this, he takes us step by step, hour by hour, through the day with "Prime" (6 AM) to "Lauds" which brings us back to the hour of waking. In 'Nones' the pivotal poem in this sequence, the crucifixion has taken place, and man is confronted by the communal and individual guilt and responsibility for the crucifixion. In contrast to this, the natural creatures are described as innocent and free from all guilt whatsoever.

"Horae Canonica" can be taken as Auden's final statement on the subject of Christian belief. As Prof. Nelson remarks, "in *For the Time Being* Auden presented the possibility for salvation inherent in the Incarnation, in *The Age of Anxiety*, he presented man's inability to realize it, in *Horae Canonica*, he presents man's guilt, his acceptance of it, and the realization that he is still, nonetheless, offered salvation. It settles matters out of historical time and resolves the difficulties man has with God."

Homage to Clio (1960)

In the next volume *Homage to Clio* Auden places man in time and tries to bring together the human aspects of beast and angel. The central theme of this volume as the title poem makes clear, is the contrast between the kingdom of Clio, Muse of Time and, therefore, of human beings, and the kingdom of Artemis and Aphrodite, rulers of plant and animal life. Aphrodite (called Provocative Aphrodite) represents sexual urge and Artemis (called Virago Artemis) represents hunting—the two basic urges of man—and therefore they must be obeyed but birth and death are 'unique historical facts' and hence, Clio should not be defied. Animals make noises but human beings are usually silent unless provoked. Clio, therefore, is called "Madonna of Silences". Since Clio is silent, he is merciful and forgiving. The children of Artemis make noise and so Aphrodite is unforgiving. But the lives of those who obey Clio "move like music." Auden appeals to Clio to forgive us for whatever noise we make and not mind our subjection to nature, and, finally, teach us through anamnesis or psychiatric case history.

Some poems in this volume also present nature as indifferent to human values. "First Things First" recounts the experience of hearing a storm and translates the storm's interjectory uproar "into the name of the loved one, but only a conventional lesson is derived from it. The poem is an example of how far Auden can take his anti-romantic attitude, as the sacred image that the storm evoked at night disappears with the cold light of morning. Thus, this anti-romantic poem concludes on a very appropriate note

Thousands have lived without love, not one without water.

The prose interlude, "Dichtung and wahrheit" makes the transition to Part II of the volume. Here Auden discusses the relation between poetry and truth and the role of the poet as the exponent of language.

Part II begins with "Dame Kind" which goes through the whole gamut of poetic diction, from the colloquial and bawdy to the technical and archaic. Dame Kind is Aphrodite's substitute in this poem as she personifies sexual instincts. This poem is a sort of reaction against the problem of writing the

truth about love.

This volume closes with "Goodbye to the Mezzogiorne", which is a personal commentary on national characteristics in the lighter vein. The "Academic Graffiti" printed as an addendum is full of a series of clerihews (short witty, comic or nonsensical verses usually in four lines of varying length) which are amusing limericks on Yeats and Eliot.

On the whole, *Homage to Clio* was coldly received by critics who rated it inferior to *The Shield of Achilles*. Thomas Gunn in a review of the book wrote that this was Auden's worst work. Monroe Spears, however, felt that "some of the failures and peculiarities of *Homage to Clio* seem to derive from an uncertainly of rapport with the audience. The poems in lighter vein, which Auden defined as 'nonsense verse' were probably a reaction against American seriousness in poetry, but they failed to impress the critics.

ABOUT THE HOUSE (1966)

Auden's next volume *About the House* has two parts. The first part consists of a series of poems about the various rooms —the study, the cellar, the attic, the guest room, the dining room, the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom etc.—in Auden's house in Austria. He is not unconscious of the fact that the public will not like such a celebration of domestic virtues, and so he takes the middle path between intimacy and sermonizing. These poems suggest the minor sanctity of the daily life. For the first time in Auden the daily routine of a man's life is seen both as symbolic of his existential nature and as meaningful in itself, for one cannot fail to notice in it an assertion of the values of the body against the 'Manichees'.

The second part of the volume "Ins and Outs" deals with the theme of man's uncertain respect for the present world. The first poem "A Change of Air" is, like some of his earlier poems, concerned with spiritual enlightenment. Diseases are considered as psychosomatic symptoms of "estrangement between your name and you."

In "You" Mind addresses the Body saying that the split between the two was caused by their having developed at different rates, but the poem does not satisfy man's curiosity as to why only Mind feels guilty or why man remains so anxious

about his spiritual life.

The "Elegy for J.F.K." is a fine poem about the assassination of American President John F. Kennedy, but without much direct reference to him.

The last poem in this collection, "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" is based on an idea just the reverse of what Auden had deployed in "A Short Ode to a Philologist" namely, language is the mother, not the handmaid of thought, but it does not go with the ecumenical point that Auden tries to make :

> The Holy Ghost
> does not abhor a golfer's Jargon,
> a Lower-Austrian accent, the cadences even
> of my own little Anglo-American
> musico-literary set (though difficult,
> saints at least may think in algebric
> without sin) . . . .

The poem is throughout concerned with such boundaries, (though it talks about geographical boundaries too) because the fact that Anglican Auden is attending a Roman Mass implies a decline in the secular influence of the churches which is treated at length in the second part of the poem.

City Without Walls (*1969*) was the last volume to be published in Auden's life-time. These poems, however, do not break any new ground in theme or style. The problems arising from the complexity of modern civilization continue to occupy the poet. His manner of handling these problems also continues to be intellectual. He combines seriousness with lightness of tone as in his earlier volumes. Most of the poems of this collection are thermatically linked to the poems published earlier. The title poem "City Without Walls" reminds one of "Memorial for the City" in *Nones* and Joseph Weinheber of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", in *Another Time*. But the poems of *City Without Walls* are different in tone from the poems of the 1950s. Whereas they struck a note of reconciliation and hope, the poems in the *City Without Walls* are characterized by a bitterness of love and pungent irony.

The title poem "City Without Walls" presents the modern civilized world with all its ugliness and vices. The technolo-

gical progress has made man self-centred and extremely unmindful of his fellow-beings. The only company that he gets is "newsprint" and so he feels bored with life. The use of excellent irony makes the poem lively ond exciting.

The sequel to this poem, "Prologue at Sixty" is a self-elegy which combines, in the true Audenesque manner, high seriousness with lightness of tone which distinguished him from the beginning. It presents the ethos of our age through excellent irony. It synthesizes the private and public voices which makes it a poem of great power and charm.

Almost all the poems in this volume abound in wit and wisdom, but they are not of uniform quality, as they never were in any volume of Auden's. In fact the last volume contains only a few of his great poems. But his technical skill and intellectual power are constantly at work.

Thank You, Fog, published posthumously in 1974 also does not make any significant departure from the earlier volumes. Most of these poems were written after Auden's return to England in 1972. As the title poem "Thank You, Fog" indicates, Auden is happy to be back in England. The rest of the poems, too, have a jolly mood, but there are no new experiments in style and technique.

3

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

The various influences on Auden led him to write in a wide variety of styles. Besides, the thirties during which Auden wrote most of his early poetry were a period of great crisis, and hence, he had to make constant adjustments in his form and technique. He wrote all kinds of poetry and in all kinds of styles which often bewilder the critics. But the fact remains that Auden is the master of many styles of poetry. One critic describes him as "a stylistic chameleon."

The diversity of Auden's work is indeed amazing. Even in the small amount of poetry he had written by 1937, he made use of numerous devices. He experimented with new styles from the prose of Henry James's late works to the nursery rhymes after Edward Lear. In between, he wrote parodies, songs, ballads, operas etc.

His earliest poetry, that is, the poetry that he wrote between 1927 and 1932 is mainly concerned with themes of youth and family ties. Though he was careless and never bothered to correct or polish his verses, it is very powerful and the power came from 'underplayed perceptiveness' and 'inexhaustably rich feelings.' But the reader is often puzzled by a frequent change of symbols which were often private and personal. Nevertheless, he finds the early poetry both amusing and provocative.

Auden's early style has been called "telegraphese" by Louis Mac Neice because of his frequent leaving out of articles, relatives, connectives, pronouns and auxiliary verbs. The early style has, besides, in Hoggart's words, "a stark air, caused both by the ellipsis and by heavy debts to Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic verse." Auden is keen to experiment with all sorts of forms

and manners of expression with a view to evolving a hard cerebral style.

In his early poems, Auden shows more trust in the efficaciousness of words than in his later poems, but his images here, by and large, do not grow in any organic way. Sometimes his chain of images has no imaginative connection. Besides, his unselective use of imagery sometimes bores the reader as, for example,

> "... .the intolerable neural itch,
> The exhaustion of meaning, the liar's quinsy."

What some readers may take to be subtle is only a clever disguising of his carelessness by his technical skill. His metaphors also do not suggest higher meanings within themselves as symbols.

Auden was not incompetent—he could be highly suggestive, could see a connection, understand a nuance and grasp a revealing correspondence, but in the early phase he wrote without much care or effort. He also wrote in a particular mode without pausing to make sure that it was the most suitable for the poem he was writing. Perhaps he realized his indiscretion later in life when he described his early poetry as "rioted with irrelevance" and "pure rubbish." But at this stage he was more concerned with surprising, shocking or seducing the reader into serious self-examination and in this he was quite successful. Besides, the overall impression one gathers after gathering his early poems is that Auden possessed a rich sensibility and a great technical virtuosity even at this early stage.

In the period between 1933 and 1938, Auden experimented with a wide variety of traditional and popular forms as he wanted to popularize his ideas derived from Freud, Homer Lane and Karl Marx. Sometimes the poetry of the period has been described as 'propaganda poetry' but on the whole it is more successful poetry.

Another characteristic feature of the middle style is the conversational meter. This was perhaps a logical outcome of his early efforts to hammer out for himself "a supple and discursive style" capable of wide variation. The beginnings of this new manner can be seen in poem XXII of *Poems 1930* This is achieved by a manipulation of speech rhythms in a

manner as to produce a distinct tone of voice. The earliest practitioners of the conversational meter were Langland and Skeleton. It was taken up later by Dryden and in the modern time by Hopkins, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, Wilfred Owen and last but not the least, T. S. Eliot. The verse written in this manner is flexible yet firm, and is useful in many ways, besides introducing direct conversation between the writer and the reader which Auden admired in W. B. Yeats.

Auden's early poetry was predominantly didactic, but by 1935 the didactic element almost disappeared, for he felt that he should use parables instead of preaching directly at his audience. Most of his developments in manner and technique since this time, therefore, grow out of his search for more effective, though always indirect, didactic means.

Whereas Auden's early poetry tended to the private and was inclined towards fantasy, the poetry of his late thirties tended to the public, the discursive and the explicitly diagnostic. His demotic interests were of great service to his poetry in the practice of the epigrammatic line and of various conversational meters.

In the mid-thirties Auden also wrote some very fine lyrics which we find in *Nones*. "The note which seems most characteristic and most impressive in the lyrics," writes Hoggart, "is of a kind of stillness ; not a passivity nor always the stillness of menace, but a held imaginative stassis where the spirit looks steadily and often tenderly at a still moment of experience. It is all, of course, as much a matter of sound as of sense." Auden was obviously influenced by Rilke who exhorted the poet to sit still and absorb, to "bless what there is for being." His most typical lyric is "May with its light behaving."

Auden's lyrics have been a continuous feature of his poetry from the mid-thirties to *Nones*, and they form a substantial and most distinguished part of his poetic output. "O who can ever praise enough" and "Deftly, Admiral" are his most admirable lyrics. Auden had an extraordinary gift for lyrics and F. W. Dupee and John Bradbury are quite right in describing him as essentially a lyrical talent "which is at its best in sustaining poetic effects within a relatively short space."

During the period under review, Auden also wrote songs of all kinds which form his greatest accomplishment. They are

also his most popular verse. It is in the songs that he was able to achieve the two things he had been constantly striving for : (1) an intimate contact with the audience and (2) the quality of lightness in verse. Auden's deep interest in popular songs is established beyond doubt by his two anthologies : *The Poet's Tongue* and *The Oxford Book of Light Verse.* Perhaps he left no variety untouched. He wrote carols, ballads, sea shanties, nursery rhymes, blues, waltz, spirituals, singing games, riddles etc. His plays also contain a large number of songs.

Monroe K. Spears divides Auden's songs into two types; Popular songs and Art songs. Popular songs, he says, are those written to fit an existing tune or to suggest a specific kind of music (blues, waltz, ballad) ; Art songs are written with the intention of being suitable for musical setting of whatever sort the composer chooses, or produce the impression of special suitability for musical setting. Art songs, often, are like lyrics and sometimes it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two.

POPULAR SONGS

Most of Auden's songs in the plays belong to this category. The influence of Brecht is obvious in these songs. Though the beginning of this kind of song was made in *Poems 1933* (which was a revised edition of *Poems 1930*, but seven poems were dropped and seven new poems were added), which parody the language of popular songs, yet the full flowering of the technique takes place in the plays, and the poems benefit from it later. Probably, the best of all the ballads is "As I walked out one evening," published in 1938, though Auden said that it was not a ballad but a "pastiche of folk song." Certainly it is not a ballad in the sense that "Miss Gee" and "Victor" are. It is closer to folk poetry than ballad.

One important type of popular songs is songs for children. Simple in form, they are like nursery rhymes or the hymns or the traditional verses for children. For these Auden might have derived his inspiration from Blake's *Songs of Experiences.*

ART SONGS

Art songs are written to be set to music. They should

at least produce the illusion of being specially suitable for musical setting.

Auden had a good background of music. He had been a singer and a piano player. He said that the intention of writing for music produced new and beautiful kinds of poetry, and that it was a close association of poets and musicians that produced so rhythmical a poetry in the Elizabethan age. Auden's "Look Stranger on this Island" is a beautiful musical poem.

Auden's experience of writing sometimes explicitly for music and often with the possibility of musical setting had a great effect on his poetry in general. He maintained his interest in the relation of music and poetry and wrote several critical essays on the subject.

Auden's belief that a poet should write objectively led him to write songs, for he thought of songs as "the least personal and most verbal." His fondness for light verse was also the consequence of his belief in the theory of objectivity in poetry. After 1935 Auden started using words in an 'unserious' way, no matter how serious the theme of the poem. Even his nature poems, to use Blair's words "have the flavour of comic verse in which the droll image or the witty incongruity may appear at any moment." "Dame Kind," for example, has a serious subject but the style is not, as its word choices and conversational flow give it a comic flavour.

Auden wrote light verse not for the pleasure it gave but because lightness in poetry ensures a rather close relation between the poet and his audience. Auden felt that he could reach a large audience only though light verse and so he started using the language of popular songs and speech. Light verse provided Auden a stimulus to develop his unserious technique. It also suggested striking variation on old saws or folk figures, and verse forms in which colloquical diction and witty rhymes were appropriate. It provided a vehicle for treating serious subjects in an ironically lowbrow manner.

Auden, therefore, tried his hand at all kinds of light verse —madrigal, limmerick, clerihew blues and ballad. He excelled in ballad which in his hands revived the case and flexibility of the folk type.

Auden's experiments in light verse provided him an opportunity to explore the principle of poetic unexpectedness.

He had learned from Kierkegaard that "the most direct source of aesthetic interest is the unexpected or the incongruous." Auden continued to apply this principle to his poetry and made it a part of his technique even in his later poetry. He can make the most serious point in an unserious way . This led Stephen Spender to remark that a kind of frivolity is dominant in Auden's poetry. There is no doubt that Auden successfully cultivated a style in which he could treat the most serious subjects in a trivial way. In fact, since 1940 Auden began to assert that the world of poetry should not be taken as something more serious than "playful hypohthesis" though after the Second World War he stopped writing songs and instead started writing *Opera libretti*. Whereas in the song the poet is usually dominant, in the libretti, the poet provides the composer with the maximum of musical opportunities. Auden's contribution to the rehabilitation of *Opera libretti* is also formidable.

Though the most striking feature of the style of the mid-thirties is its popular appeal, Auden also wrote sophisticated poetry like the sonnets which are his great contribution to English poetry. He took Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* as his model, and achieved great mastery in this form. Before him Hardy, Robinson, Frost, Wilfred Owen had written in this manner and Auden might have got his inspiration from them. But he followed very faithfully Rilke's characteristic device of putting unidentified persons (indicated by pronouns, he, she, they) in usually symbolic landscapes, with the sonnet beginning in the middle of an unexplained dramatic suggestion. Rilke's technique made possible the bringing together of the abstract and the concrete. In fact, the problem of writing them had been bothering poets since the seventeenth century, but it was Rilke who provided the solution. As Auden said in a review, Rilke's method is just the opposite of the Elizabethans. Unlike the metaphysicals who used intellectual terms, Rilke used physical terms to express abstract ideas in concrete' terms. "One of Rilke's characteristic devices", Auden said, 'is the expression of human life in terms of landscape." To Auden as to Rilke, the inner and the outer worlds seemed to interpenetrate. The symbolism in Auden's early poems was, by and large, natural. In the Quest sonnets it became conscious and explicit. There are three types of landscape symbolism in

Auden. In the one, the landscape represents emotional states or situations. In such poems ("Paysage Maralise" for example) island stands for escape, cities for society and civilization, water for belief, valleys for passiveness and mountains for effort. The second type symbolizes an individual's mind, his character and beliefs, and sometimes his body through landscape. The third type which Spears calls "moralized anatomy" appears in, for example, "Sentries against Inner and Outer" in which the features are interpreted in the manner of bestiary, and the mouth fixed on as the distinctively human feature, capable of speech and therefore of lying and treachery, vulnerable and erotic."

Auden's imagination works largely in terms of dramatic images which are usually translations of abstract ideas. His greatest achievement in the realm of imagery is the recovery of the archaic imagery—"fells, scraps overhung by kestrels, the becks with their pot-holes left by the receding glaciers of the age of ice." The archaic imagery is recovered not for any picturesque use but for serving a fine irony which includes the poet as well as the class to which he belongs.

Auden also makes sharp contrasts such as "foundaries with their fires cold," or "flooded coal-mines" or "silted harbour", to give vitality to his verse and for the purpose of satire. When he directs his satire at smugness or complacency, he uses shocking contrasts which are sometimes involved in the central pattern of the poem. Auden uses the method of broad satire when he relies more heavily on the external framework to pull the poem together as in poem XVI in *Poems 1930*. The following lines from section IV of the poem illustrate the unity Auden aims at

> It is time for the destruction of error.
> The chairs are being brought in from the garden,
> The summer talks stopped on that savage coast
> Before the storms, after the guests and birds :
> In Sanatoriums they laugh less and less,
> Less certain of cure ; and the loud madman
> Sinks now into a more terrible calm.
>
> The falling leaves know it, the children,
> At play on the fuming alkali-tip

Or by the flooded football ground, know it—
This is the dragon's day, the devourer's :

Apart from the fullness and richness of tone and the organic quality of the rhythm, the contrasts among the various items serve to build up the quiet but powerful irony which the poem achieves. The chairs are being brought in because of the fear of storm, but the preceding line mentions 'destruction' and hence, they are being brought in also to thwart the attempt to destroy. People who can afford the gardens show only casual interest in them. They can look at the "destruction of error" as only a storm to be escaped by migrating to other lands. Another irony can be seen in the "savage cat" attracting the gentle folk because it is savage, and therefore romantic and picturesque. The summer talk, the patient's laughter, and the cries of the mad man are ironically linked together in an insight which involves the nature of the whole civilization. In the last four lines the various images are closely related. The children described as the falling leaves, is a natural image, but the fuming alkali-tip is not, and yet it is natural that the children should play upon it for they have no place but the industrial rubbish heaps on which to play. These innocent children know what is to come as the adults or the rulers do not. One can also see the connection between the reference to the children and the reference to the dragon, as the children are afraid of him. Ironically therefore, as well as literally, it should be the children who know that the dragon's day has come. With the development of these ironies further relationships become obvious : the children, the mad man, the sick, the leaves become related in their sharing of a knowledge which ironically is denied to the adults.

In the middle period Auden's imagery became more complex but less obscure. He could fuse different images into a coherent whole and make them more powerful as well as more meaningful. He also used a number of images in place of a single image to make the abstract concrete. The poem gets its meaning not from any one image but from all the images taken together.

Auden used the simile also with equal effect. It greatly heightens his meaning, as for example

Will Ferdinand be as fond of a Miranda Familiar as a stocking?

Or

Fascinating like a lie

Or

Weak like the vows of a drunkard.

The common qualities of Auden's similes are pungent conciseness and a starting contrast—a shock of surprise at the incongruity of the relationship called upon. This is usually produced by mating the abstract with the concrete, the idea or quality with the strikingly contemporaneous visual image. In his later poetry Auden used his simile rather sparingly.

The most common rhetorical figure in Auden's poetry is personification. This technique helps him in the dramatic structure of his poems as well as in his use of allegory. This also helps him in distinguishing between abstract things as in

Fear.
That laconic war-bitten captain

Or

Envy, their brilliant pamphleteer

Similarly, Auden also presents mythological figures as personification of certain qualities, as for example, he uses Aphrodite as a personification of sexual love in the 1950s, as Eros in the 1940s.

Auden also made extensive use of allegory. In fact, he preferred allegory to symbolism. In one of his comments he pointed out the difference between allegory and symbolism :

"Allegory is a form of rhetoric, a device for making the abstract concrete ; in nearly all successful allegory the images used do in fact have a symbolic value over and above their allegorical use, but that is secondary to the poet's purpose."

Auden makes allegory do a lot more than merely enable the reader to understand the abstract or public meaning of a poem. His didactic approach required the reader to become involved in a process of self-assessment. An allegory, therefore, must first lead the reader to assent to the truth of a widely applicable insight into human existence. Then only will the reader go on to apply the general truth to himself. To quote Auden's own words

"The present day reader of poetry has to make an effort that was not demanded of readers in earlier times ; he has to translate what is actually said in a poem into the terms of his analogous experiences."

Auden wants his readers to see the particulars of a poem through its abstracts and general significance to his own personal self-examination. He uses allegory specifically for this purpose. Any image is good enough to Auden so long as it helps the reader to grasp the 'abstract' truth he has in mind.

Auden has also written a number of poems in the particular allegorical genre he liked most—the allegorical landscape. Rilke had developed a device by which he expressed human life in terms of landscape. Auden, following Rilke, cultivated this device extensively and found it so intriguing that he used it to concieve a moralized civilization. The condition of the countryside in his poems shows the general condition of the civilization. The landscape of rusting machinery and abandoned mines, for example, reveals "a lot about the country's soul."

Auden can make an allegorical use of almost every imagery. He can use material from mathematics, natural history, geology, meteorology, archaelogy, mythology, liturgics and cooking to provide the appropriate imagery for illustrating or embodying his schematic analysis. Thus most of his images whether taken from landscape or mathematics are moralized or humanized.

Auden used the device of allegory as a technique for bringing the private into contact with the public and thus established a rapport between the poet and the public which has become so rare in our time. He employed all the anti-romantic techniques that suppress the private and the subjective and enabled him to establish contact with the outside world. Auden's rhetorical and allegorical devices make his poetry intellectual rather than emotional, but they go a long way in making the reader believe that he too has a place in the larger scheme of things.

Auden's early poetry suffered from an incongruity of theme and style—the theme was romantic and the style anti-romantic —but by 1940 this incongruity completely disappeared. In the later poems, one cannot fail to notice a new development in style—the emergence of a kind of theological light verse. Auden

had now recovered his faith in Christianity, and his poems in the forties were being coloured by his new faith. He tried to adjust his art to his new metaphysical point of view. But critics like Randall Jarrell and Joseph Warren Beach criticized his long poems of the 1940s for being diffuse in thought and uncertain in technique. Later volumes, however, like *The Shield of Achilles* and *Homage to Clio* disprove these allegations. There is some confusion in thought and technique in the long poems of the forties, but it is not difficult to see the development and direction of Auden's work if one examines the attitudes and ideas of the various characters in the dramas and studies carefully the exact nature of the persona in the non-dramatic works. Auden's persona is an interesting but a serious man. He is the human image within the poem, the face that the reader sees behind the voice, the man one imagines to be speaking the poem. Auden's person is first concerned with gaining knowledge, and after gaining it, his second concern is to impart it to others.

Besides, in Auden's later verse one finds the predominance of traditional stanza forms and unique creations like "streams". In his early verse, he was opposed to the use of traditional forms, but as he matured as a poet, he displayed a profound concern for precision of formal control as a means of controlling and stimulating the imagination. Auden had very clear views about verse forms and their importance.

"The choice of verse form is only half-conscious. No form will express everything, as each form is particularly good at expressing something. Forms are chosen by poets because the most important part of what they have to say seems to go better with that form than any other..... and then, in its turn, the forms develops and shapes the poet's imagination so that he says things which he did not know he was capable of saying ; and at the same time those parts of his imagination which once had other things to say dry up from lack of use."

Once Auden had chosen a particular form for a poem, he allowed the form to give direction and shape to his ideas. Thus the verse form has a special importance in Auden's creative process. He wanted to explore the possibilities of all possible forms and see what he could do with them. His most brilliant piece of technical virtuosity is "Canzone" (1945) where sixty-

five lines employ only five rhyme words altogether. Since 1945 Auden created for himself a number of new forms which are as challenging as some of the traditional forms. Arbitrary imagery and unusual diction are the natural consequences of the rhyme and line-length used, but they help to hide the harshness of language as in "Streams".

The contribution of Auden's forms to his poems is great but this has been ignored by critics who call him "a conscious artist". Auden's remark in this context is worth quoting :

"Those who confine themselves to free verse because they imagine that strict forms must of necessity lead to dishonesty, do not understand the nature of art, how little the conscious artist can do and what large and mysterious beauties are the gifts of language, tradition and pure accident."

Auden sincerely abandoned himself to the form and then watched the performance of his own imagination.

Auden has rightly been called a stylistic chameleon. One reason why he tried so many styles was that he wanted to avoid the kind of "personalism" that would make each of his poems an unmistakably Auden poem. Auden also cautioned other poets to guard themselves against the tendency to develop an "over personal" style. "An over personal style" he wrote in an essay, "becomes a prison from which the poet cannot escape. Another reason for his writing so many styles was the possibility of exploring the potentialities latent in the self and the imagination. As Blair puts it, "Auden seeks out new styles as a means to discovering new insights." His technical virtuosity will always remain a matter of great curiosity. Edmund Wilson does him no more than justice when he writes :

"In metrics, in architectonics, as well as in handling of language, he is, of course, an incredible virtuoso—the most accomplished poet in English since the great nineteenth century masters ; Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne ; he does not call attention to this, and many people who read him do not even know it."

4

IDEAS AND THEMES

From his student days Auden had been a voracious reader. He wished to become an engineer but somebody suggested to him that he had the makings of a poet and so he gave up engineering for poetry. His interests now became literary, but psychology interested him most. As he was growing to be a poet, his country was passing through one of the most critical periods of its history. Auden, therefore, was impelled by an urge to use his poetic talent for a sacred cause—the amelioration of the economic, social and political condition of his country in which he felt "nobody was well." With this aim in view he made a close study of the various ideas and "isms" that were in the air—Freudianism, Marxism, Existentialism, Humanism etc. so that he might be able to use them for improving the lot of his fellow-men.

Auden made a liberal use of these and other ideas in his poetry. He wrote poetry with the specific purpose of contributing his mite for the betterment of his country and countrymen. He had a great sympathy for "the lonely, the lost and the unhappy," and so in his early phase, he employed his knowledge of psychology for diagnosing their ailments and suggesting a cure. After sometime, when he read Marx and Engels, he began to suggest Marxism as a possible solution. But when Marxism also began to seem 'inadequate', he went back to "Love" and became its ardent advocate, as he found it to have a great healing effect. This ultimately led him to adopt Christianity which, being based on love, promised to be the panacea for all ills and evils.

Though Auden's poetry cannot be said to have a very coherent system of philosophy, it is inspired by a strong purpose

and cast into an intellectual mould. His poetry is based on ideas which he found relevant from time to time for the realisation of his purpose. But there is not much contradiction, as, basically, it was a progress in the same direction. Different solutions seemed appealing at different phases of his long career but there is an undercurrent running throughout his poetry and that is the desire to bring about a "change of heart." This makes his poetry intellectual or imaginative leaving little scope for emotion.

But Auden felt very much emotionally disturbed by the challenging social and economic problems around him. During all the three phases of his poetic career—the early, the middle and the last phase—he is equally concerned about man's miserable plight and is preoccupied with exploring ways and means of pulling him out of his terrible situation. His concern was emotional, but his treatment was intellectual, and this made his poetry a little difficult for the average reader.

In his early phase, Auden emphasizes the need for establishing a new order which, he says, man can bring about only by changing himself as well as the conditions around him. He felt that the conditions in the thirties were most uncongenial for man's harmonious development. Those conditions, if not changed could bring disaster to human personality. Man had, therefore, to make a choice between change and death. If he did not want to die, he must change himself and his surroundings. Auden thus creates in his readers an awareness of his unfortunate situation and a realization of the need of conquering those forces within himself which prevent him from bringing about the necessary change in himself and his surroundings. For a time, Marxism seemed the answer, but the poetry of his religious phase makes it clear that Christianity alone can bring man that peace and harmony which he needs most and which he is struggling hard to find. Auden accepted the Christian concept of Sin, Grace and Redemption because as Joseph Warren Beach writes, "he had been so utterly disillusioned with regard to man's capacity for goodness". He ultimately realized that it was only by accepting the Christian belief that man is essentially a sinner that life could become bearable. How life could be made bearable or acceptable was Auden's lifelong concern. His answer now was that if man

concedes his sinful nature, he becomes full of humility which replaces his pride for being the noblest of God's creations. He can also live in greater harmony with his neighbours and friends once he concedes his sinful nature. People will come closer to one another as they realize that they are all sinners. This will pave the way for a happy society in which it will be possible for man to develop his personality according to his wish. This is the ultimate goal of life and any civilized society must work in that direction. This was also Auden's cherished ideal.

Though his means of arriving at this goal changed from time to time, the goal always remained the same. As Prof. Beach aptly remarks, "We have to walk warily and make allowance for a good deal of interpenetration of ideas and attitudes from the several periods and ideological systems. While the terms change and emphasis shifts, there is a continuity of feeling and drive that tends towards the assimilation of views in one stage to those in another." The terms change and the emphasis shifts because Auden is determined to explore a system or ideology that will bring about man's spiritual regeneration which alone can solve all his problems.

It has sometimes been suggested that Auden gave up one idea or system for another because he found it inadequate. The truth, however, is that Auden never rejected any ideology or belief as of no avail. One thing, in fact, led him to another, and thus, he brought about a synthesis of various ideas and beliefs in his poetry which few poets have been able to achieve. His social and psychological ideas and humanistic and religious beliefs were all harnessed for the same purpose. The fact that he prayed both for the lost and good souls goes to prove that his concern was humanitarian, but at bottom it is religious :

> "We pray the power to take upon themselves the guilt
> Of human action, though still as ready to confess
> The imperfection of what can and must be built,
> The wish and power to act, forgive, and bless."

Auden once wrote that an artist must wait until what he believes to be a good idea for work comes to him. A good idea excited him as the beauty of nature excites some poets, with the result that ideas did not remain mere ideas in his

poetry. They are transformed into fantasy, images or symbols or parables. His poems, therefore, do not become philosophical discourses but remain poetry presenting his attitude towards a particular problem. His approach is intellectual, but it is inspired by a sense of service to his fellowmen. And his technical versatility gives it a poetic form which isr endered beautiful by his infinite capacity for inventing imageries and myths. He has the gift of dressing his ideas in poetic robes so that they do not remain mere abstract knowledge. His myths and parables and images and symbols do not give us an insight into his personal feelings but reveal his ideas and thoughts. His images and myths have only one function to perform—to make his views clear to the reader who has to usher in the new order. Thus his images and ideas are very closely related to each other; the image makes the idea clear and the idea makes the image transparent.

But it would not be correct to conclude, as some critics have done, that Auden is an intellectual poet and, therefore, there is no place for feelings in his poetry. As Stephen Spender, his very close friend, remarks, Auden "states with his heart as well as his intellect." His heart and intellect combined as "two eyes make one in sight," to borrow the words of Robert Frost. But Auden makes us think more than feel. This is only as it should be, for man has first to give a serious thought to his present plight and then only he can think out a satisfactory solution which would please his heart.

Main Ideas

As Auden grew up, he came under the influence of one idea or the other. In his secular phase, that is, before he became a convert to Christianity, he was mostly under the influence of psychologists—Freud, John Layard, Groddeck and Homer Lane and so he made a psychological approach to the problems which seemed to him most serious and worthy of immediate attention. Later in life he felt the imperative need of a faith and so adopted Christianity as it seemed to him the only solution for man's suffering. But there are certain basic principles which are present in both his secular and religious phases. They direct his thinking and may be termed "Love" and "Quest".

As a student at Oxford, Auden gained an extensive knowledge of the theories of modern psychology which, as Stephen Spender observes, "he used as a means of understanding himself and dominating his friends." (Both Stephen Spender and Isherwood described their relation to Auden as partly that of a patient to an analyst). The knowledge of psychology was also of immense help to him in diagnosing the ills and ailments of the individual as well as the society which was the main concern of his life and art. In fact, it was his rich background of psychology that led him to believe that the poet's first duty is to be "clinically-minded." As Monroe K. Spears writes, "the notion of the poet as clinically detached, diagnosing the sickness of a society and its component individuals, and of poetry as a kind of therapy, performing a function somehow analogous to the psychosomatic, is fundamental in Auden's writing." Auden already well-versed in the theories of Groddeck and Freud, became a believer in the psychosomatic theory of diseases during his stay in Berlin. Stephen Spender tells us in *World Within World* : "Once he had been told by a doctor that he must walk as little as possible, so he immediately began going for thirty-mile walks. He had a theory that body is controlled by the mind. He would explain a headache, a cold, a sore throat in what are now called 'psychosomatic terms'." This is borne out by a line Auden wrote in *Letters from Iceland*, "The pure-in-heart is never ill . . . . " In fact he had learnt from John Layard who was a disciple of Homer Lane (the American psychologist) that physical disease is always symptomatic of a psychological cause. Auden therefore developed a feeling that the root cause of all diseases and sins is the sense of guilt. The sense of guilt has first to be removed if a sickness has to be cured, as, according to him, the physical sickness is only a symptom of the sickness of the soul. Auden wrote, "when people are ill, they are wicked; a sore throat means that the sufferer has been lying; cancer means refusal to make use of creative powers; rheumatism means obtinacy, refusal to bend the knee; deafness and short sight are attempts to shut out the exterior world; epilepsy is an attempt to become an angel and fly." As one critic comments, the great attraction for Auden of this kind of diagnosis was that in interpreting disease as morally symbolic, it made

possible a new mode of rendering moral abstraction concrete and vivid.

Thus the influence of the psychologists is most important at this stage. The ideas of death-wish, the supremacy of the unconscious, repression and guilt, the conflict between the ego and the super ego, anxiety and instinctual life, neurosis and Oedipus complex found in his early poems are all Freudian ideas. From Groddeck he learned that the "unconscious" is a part of the psyche which itself is a part of "It". "It", according to Groddeck, is "deepest nature and force of man" which is responsible for everything that happens with and through and in man; it is responsible for his existence. Auden, accordingly, treats "It" as the creative life-force in his early phase and believes that if man lives in harmony with his creative life-force, he leads a happy life, but if he suppresses it or ignores it, he will not be a normal man. Suppression or repression of "It" also produces diseases. Auden used the idea he got from the psychologists to analyse the sickness and unhappiness of the modern man, and the moral and spiritual degeneration of the society at large. He also saw a cure for this in the purity of heart which had been emphasized by all the psychologists he had closely studied. D. H. Lawrence and Andre Gide strengthened his belief, as he confesses in the following lines :

> Part came from Lane and part from D. H. Lawrence
> Gide, though I didn't know it then, gave part
> They taught me to express my deep abhorrence
> If I caught anyone preferring Art
> To life and love and being pure-in-heart.

What all these writers had in common was that suppression and repression of natural desires had a bad effect on man's mind as well as his body. Man, therefore, must revolt against those acts and institutions which hampered the free and natural growth of his personality. This becomes the theme of Auden's early poetry.

In his poetry of the thirties Auden uses these ideas to analyse the causes of social decay with the same passion with which he analysed the psychic maladies of the individuals in his early poetry. But now he comes under the influence of Karl Marx also. Marx and Engels were held in high esteem

during this decade not only by Auden but by almost all the writers and poets of this time. They considered capitalism as the source of all evils, and hence, regarded Marx and Engels as the saviours of the masses who were being exploited by the capitalists. Their views regarding class struggle, their condemnation of those who denied the workers the full reward of their labour and their rejection of the government of the capitalists seemed very appealing to Auden as well as the other intellectuals of the age. Among such great writers of the decade as William Empson, Cecil Day Lewis, Rex Warner, Stephen Spender and William Plomer there was "a near unanimity" on Marxism as the panacea for all social ills. These writers did not form a group but, as Spender says, it was Auden's influence which brought them together and it was because of Auden that they shared the belief that Marxism was the only solution of the social crisis in their country.

It was, in fact, Marx's insistence on the freedom of the will that became the central point of Auden's thinking and strengthened his idea of action and change. He was also impressed by Marx's theory that human knowledge and history are born out of an interaction between man and his environment. In an essay Auden wrote :

"On the whole Marx seems to me correct in his view that physical conditions and the forms of economic production have dictated the forms of communities"

and

"Again Marx seems to me correct in saying that sovereignty or government is not the result of a contract made by society as a whole, but has been assumed by those people in society who owned the instruments of production."

More than anything else, it was Auden's powerful desire for action and change that drew him closer to Marx. Both thought action and change absolutely necessary for the attainment of greater moral freedom. Auden wrote :

"But any change towards a greater freedom of action is morally good change . . . But moral good passes into natural good . . . In man the evolution can be continued, each stage of moral freedom being superseded by a new one."

These ideas, therefore, became the ideological basis of most of the poems of the nineteen-thirties, as well as the plays

written during this time. In *The Dance of Death* Auden writes

We shall build tomorrow
A new clean town
With no more sorrow
Where lovely people walk up and down.

Towards the end of this play Karl Marx appears and announces the death of capitalism personified by a Dancer. He says that the Dancer is liquidated because "the instruments of production have been too much for him."

Though the writings of this phase are considerably influenced by Marxian ideology, Auden cannot be called a staunch Marxist, nor, as Stephen Spender argues, can he be said to have passed through a Marxist phase :

"He had a firmer grasp of Marxist ideology and more capacity to put this into good verse than many writers who were closer to Communism. This led to the legend that he went through a Communist phase. But his poem 'A Communist to Others', is an exercise in entering a point of view not his own. It is his summing up of conversations with Communists rather like the one I used to have with Chalmers in Berlin."

Auden himself wrote in March 1955 :

"Looking back, it seems to me that the interest in Marx taken by myself and my friends . . . was more psychological than political; we were interested in Marx in the same way that we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle class ideologies, not with the intention of repudiating our class, but with the hope of becoming better bourgeois . . . ."

Monroe K. Spears hit the nail on the head when he declared that, "Auden clearly never believed that political values were ultimate, transcending moral and religious ones; his Marxisms which was always unorthodox, was essentially another dimension added to the psychological analysis which was itself always potentially religious."

Thus, Auden's interest in Marxism remained an intellectual curiosity and influenced his attitude during the thirties. It was this attitude which determined the themes of his poems, particularly between 1933 and 1938. But at heart he was a liberal humanist, inspiration for which had come as much from

Marxism as from psychology. Auden himself tells us about his background of liberal humanism :

"We assumed that there was only one outlook on life conceived among civilized people, the liberal humanism in which all of us had been brought up, whether we came from Christian or agnostic homes.

"To this the theological question seemed irrelevant since such values as freedom of person, equal justice for all, respect for the rights of others etc., were self-evident truths. However, the liberal humanism of the past had failed to produce the universal peace and prosperity it promised, failed even to prevent a cold war. What had it overlooked ? The subconscious, said Freud, the means of production, said Marx. Liberalism was not to be superseded; it was to be made effective instead of self-defeating."

Not satisfied with liberal humanism, Auden looked for something more meaningful. But his disillusionment increased with the rise of Fascism and the outbreak of the first world war. He began to wonder if man was really capable of bringing about his spiritual regeneration. It was this lack of faith in man's capabilities that led him to a vigorous quest for a more satisfactory ideal. During this time he met Charles Williams; an "Anglican layman" in a publisher's office and in whose presence, he tells us, he "felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving." This man stirred the religious feelings in him and he started reading theological works :

"So, presently, I started to read some theological works, Kierkegaard in particular, and began going in a tentative and experimental sort of way to church." Kierkegaard made a very deep impact on Auden's mind. Almost all his works during the forties and even later show Kierkegaard's influence more than that of any other writer or thinker. Auden wrote in 1941

"As a Christian, Kierkegaard belongs to the tradition of religious thinking . . . . represented by Augustine, Pascal, Newman, and Karl Barth as distinct both from the Thomist tradition of official Catholicism and from the liberal Protestantism of men like Schleiermacher. As a secular didactician, he is one of the great exponents of an approach, equally hostile to Cartesian

mechanism and Hegelian idealism, to which Germans have given the name Existential—though it is confined neither to Germans like Nietzsche, ... nor to professional philosophers, for the same approach is typical of what is most valuable in Marx and Freud."

Auden then proceeds to describe the fundamental approach common to different thinkers :

"In contrast to those philosophers who begin by considering the *objects* of human knowledge, essences and relations, the existential philosophers begin with man's immediate experience as a *subject*, that is, as a being in need, an interested being whose existence is at stake."

Existentialism, according to Auden, is an attempt to begin the search for a common truth by being honest about this subjectivity. He goes further and points out the relation of the theological, psychological, and political realms for the Christian Existentialist :

"From this viewpoint, the basic human problem is man's anxiety in time; for example, his present anxiety over himself in relation to his past and his parents (Freud), his present anxiety over himself in relation to his future and his neighbours (Marx), his present anxiety over himself in relation to eternity and God (Kierkegaard)."

This statement gives us an insight into Auden's concept of the age of anxiety and shows how this position transcends the earlier Freudian and Marxist analyses and, as Monroe K. Spears observes, "the anxiety viewed by Freud (or Homer Lane) as a disease, a maladjustment, is now seen as purposive, a commitment of the choice confronting man in his dreadful freedom."

Auden found in Kierkegaard's philosophy a solution to the problem of man's suffering which neither psychology nor Marxism could give him. Kierkegaard's belief that despair and hopelessness make one truly Christian drew him to Christianity which he now adopted as his final faith. Since Kierkegaard had shown him the way to religious faith, Auden became his ardent admirer. He was deeply impressed by Kierkegaard's faith in the belief that to be relieved of suffering in one sense is voluntarily to accept suffering in another. Auden was convinced that Kierkegaard's teachings were most relevant to our time, for he strongly felt that one cannot live without some sort of

faith which alone protects man against uncertainly and doubt. But Auden also saw the limitations of Kierkegaard's philosophy; it presented man purely as a spirit and not as a creature of flesh and blood. Auden referred to this limitation in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims* :

"As a spirit, a conscious person endowed with free will, every man has, through faith and grace, a unique 'existential' relation to God, and few since St. Augustine have described this relation more profoundly than Kierkegaard. But every man has a second relation to God which is neither unique nor existential : as a creature composed of matter, as a biological organism, every man, in common with everything else in the universe, is related by necessity to the God who created that universe and saw that it was good, for the laws of nature to which, whether he likes it or not, he must conform are of divine origin."

It was in Reinhold Neibuhr, another theological thinker, that Auden found an interpretation of Christianity which regarded man as both spirit and a creature of flesh and blood. Neibuhr held the view that "the issue of Biblical religion is not primarily the problem of how finite man can know God, but how sinful man is to be reconciled to God, and how history is to overcome the tragic consequence of its false eternals . . . ."

Thus the ideas of Kierkegaard and Reinhold Neibuhr form the background of Auden's poetry of the fifties and the sixties. Other influences worth mentioning during this period were C. N. Cochraine and Paul Tillicit. All these writers helped him to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of necessity and freedom, and that of divided consciousness.

Faith is man's greatest need as it makes it possible for him to establish the 'right' relation to God which is the most important thing of his life. As Auden wrote :

"There is no longer a question of establishing a relation between God and myself for as my creator he is necessarily related to his creature and the relation is presupposed by my existence; there is only a question of the right relation."

Auden found a similar emphasis on faith in the works of Reinhold Neibuhr and, therefore, was influenced by him very deeply in his attitude towards religion.

Auden believed that civilization is based upon two pre-

suppositions : (1) that throughout the universe there is one set of laws according to which all events and movements happen; (2) that there are many different realms or societies, and that the peculiar laws of these several realms are modifications of the universal laws. He argued that true civilization must be based upon absolute and religious sanctions and called for the recognition of the importance of metaphysics and theology.

Auden, however, did not suggest any panacea or programme. He only said : "Trust God and take short views. Man must become conscious of true necessity which is internal and absolute. Auden argued that a spiritual revolution (that is, a change of heart) must precede a material one, and not, as Marx thought, the other way round. Following Neibuhr and Cochraine, Auden observed that classical thought is unable to give meaning to individuality and freedom, and that a mono-lithic monotheism" is always a doctrine of God as either manic-depressive Power or Schizophrenic Truth." The Christian God of Love is not self-sufficient; hence matter is not evil, and there is no division into divine reason or mortal body. Man is thus explained as image of God and as a fallen creature. Everything that man does, says Auden, is an act of religious worship :

"Man always acts either self-loving, just for the hell of it, or God-loving, just for the heaven of it; his reasons, his appetites, are secondary motivations.

Love

People live together in a society on the basis of love; and the best society is that in which love for one's neighbour can best express itself. Auden was quite aware of the need and value of love even before he became a Christian. In the turbulent decade of the thirties when society was rocked by social and economic problems, and when sorrow and gloom had engulfed the entire nation, Auden advocated a 'change of heart'. But for a change of heart, people had to learn the lesson of love, for, as Auden said, love alone could help them get over their bitterness and hatred for those who were responsible for the deplorable state of affairs. Love alone could show them the way of unity and brotherhood which were necessary to usher in the new social order. Man could

make this world a happy and comfortable place if he could love his neighbour and spread the message of love around himself.

The concept of Love, however, was never the same for Auden. It underwent several changes during his long career as a poet. As Joseph Warren Beach writes, "love is in him one of the most elusive of terms whose aspect and meaning changes as fast as Proteus changed when seized by a Menelaus in hopes of getting him to prophesy." Sometimes it becomes very difficult to understand its real ideological significance. Auden himself finds it difficult to define 'Love' as he acknowledges in Poem X of *Poems 1930*:

> Love by ambition
> Of definition
> Suffers partition
> And cannot go
> From yes to no
> For no is not love, no is no
> The shutting of a door
> The tightening Jaw
> A conscious sorrow,
> And saying yes
> Turns love into success
> Views from the rail
> Of land and happiness,
> Assured of all
> The sofas creak
> And were this all, love were
> But cheek to cheek
> And dear to dear.

Auden's main contention in this poem is that Love is something positive and not negative, as it is not governed by such negative attitudes as selfishness, jealousy, guilt etc. It is not merely physical, for physical love is short-lived and becomes "faithless" after some time :

> Aware already
> Of who stands next
> And is not vexed

And is not giddy
Leaves the North in place
With a good grace
And would not gather
Another to another
Designs his own unhappiness
Foretells his own death and is faithless.

In Poem IX we meet a disillusioned lover who tells his beloved that he cannot love because life has not treated him well. The fountain of love has dried up in him. He is, consequently, a victim of split personality, indecision and inertia which have made him incapable of loving. Love cannot exist in disintegrated individuals or persons who have a strong death-wish. Love exists where vitality exists. That is why, the poet identifies it with the Freudian Eros which is the creative force in human beings and which is possible only in a person who has full freedom to follow his instincts. An integrated and properly developed personality only makes one capable of loving. Sense of guilt and ailments wreck the personality and thus deny it the power to love. In Poem XXVII love is suggested as the main source of a properly developed personality, but it ends with the question if it is possible for anyone to recover love :

Shall memory restore
The steps and the shore,
The face and the meeting place;
Shall the bird live,
Shall the fish dive,
And sheep obey
In a sheep's way;
Can love remember
The question and the answer,
For love recover

What has been dark and rich and warm all over ?

'Love' which is a powerful creative force ends up in most people by becoming a search for happiness or a gratification of the senses. In the early poems Auden describes the misery and the sorrow of the people who are engaged merely in self-gratification and in whom the great healing power of Love does

not exist. Self-love is the worst kind of love as it makes the individual self-centred and conceited. In *The Orators* Auden dwells upon the various kinds of self-regarding love which have brought ruin and misery to the human beings and their country. The three main kinds of such lovers are (1) excessive lovers of themselves and their neighbours, (2) defective lovers of God, and (3) Perverted Lovers. Auden's argument is that such lovers cause social and moral degeneration in the society in which they exist.

It may be pointed out that at this stage of Auden's development, Love is subordinte to natural instincts, and in this he seems to have been influenced by D. H. Lawrence. Suppression of the natural vitality of life results in perversions of love which produce an unhealthy society. England, according to Auden, has come to this state of affairs because it abounds in selfish lovers who seek their wish-fulfilment and ignore the call of Duty. Its people have become dreamers who have closed their eyes to the reality around them. They are dominated by one passion—the death wish. Such people are bound to destroy their country as it is deprived of its two vital bases—love and life. Instead, fear and hatred take their place and shatter all the values by which a society lives and flourishes. Thus perversions of Love such as self-love are harmful both for the individual and the society in which he lives.

Self-love is the theme of most of the poems of the nineteen-thirties. In a good many poems of "Look Stranger" we find self-love or guilty love pitched against selfless and disciplined love. Auden in fact wishes to show that love which is a positive source of power and vitality becomes a source of weakness and failure if it is allowed to degenerate into self-love and physical passion. Poem after poem in "Look Stranger" deals with the inadequacy of selfish love. In Poem XX of "Look Stranger" Auden shows how love when it goes into wrong directions weakens the will :

> Love gave thee power, but took the will.

The lovers in this case have the power of looking into each other's eyes but their will has been considerably weakened for they do not go to see the view on the other side of the moun-

tain which was their avowed aim. Similarly Poem XXVII of "Look Stranger" warns us against the dangers of sexual love as it arouses the mean feelings of jealousy and guilt, and keeps one from the nobler and higher feeling of love which alone can bring about real happiness and good to oneself and others. Hence sexual love is not only inadequate but a positive hinderance in purifying the heart. Love which does not lead us to a purification of the heart is bad and unhealthy both for the individual and the society and hence, should be nipped in the bud. In Poem XXIX Auden shows the sad end of selfish love through the use of allegory. Personal love which is expressed in "endearment and the look" is also dismissed as inadequate and improper since it cannot lead the human will to action which is the ultimate aim of pure love.

Pure love is selfless and disciplined. It is free from hatred and other base passions like jealousy, wickedness etc. It is guided by a spirit of service and sacrifice. It rises above the interests of an individual to include love for the neighbours, the society and the country at large. Individual interests must be sacrificed for the larger interests of the country. Auden now becomes more interested in the public cause. He now condemn selfish love not because he believes in the freedom of the unconscious as he did earlier, but because he wants to change the environment for which love has to take the help of reason and discipline. Love, therefore, is now pitched against hatred. Poem XXVII of "Look Stranger" expresses the idea that hatred which pushed out selfless and disciplined love has brought about the present deplorable state of affairs :

> While the disciplined love which alone could have
> employed these engines
> Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred
> promised
> An immediate dividend, all of us hated.

Auden feels very unhappy at people's taking recourse to hatred when hatred seems more paying. He wishes to remind people that the gains of hatred are only short-lived. People must conquer hatred to be able to love and live. In his well-known poem "September 1, 1939," Auden writes :

> "We must love one another or die."

Love alone can wipe off selfishness and hatred which are the bane of our lives. In Poem XXI of "Look Stranger", Auden advises us to subordinate our instincts to reason for instincts cannot be trusted. People who are guided by instincts cannot always be reasonable and hence they cannot have 'pure love.'

The limitations and dangers of selfish love also form the theme of several poems in *Another Time*. In Poem XXXI, the first three stanzas depict the ugly state of society dominated, as it is, by the basic passions of enmity, hatred and ill-will. Lovers born and bred in this atmosphere realize that they do not have true a pure love to offer each other. Auden's concept of love now becomes humanistic. He begins to realize that human life is bound to have limitations as a human being cannot be perfect. Therefore, his ideal of love becomes more human. Love, thus, becomes a way of living. In the lyric "Lay your sleeping head, my Love" (in *Another Time*) the lover accepts the love of his beloved even though he is aware of its limitations. He says to himself that though his beloved lying asleep on his arm may be suffering from guilt and sin, yet she is beautiful to him and completely acceptable :

> But in my arms till break of day
> Let the living creature lie,
> Mortal, guilty, but to me
> The entirely beautiful.

Love is, thus, not altogether emotional; it is guided by intellect as well as emotion. This is true of Auden's lovers in general. Poem XXVIII also presents love as it is—with all its weaknesses and limitations, but it is acceptable because of the humanistic attitude that Auden has adopted. Though it is imperfect, yet it is the only thing which can redeem us from our guilt and anxiety and become the source of human satisfaction. It is the only cure that man can find. So it is to be welcomed inspite of all its limitations. Thus Auden's basic concern is humanistic. Since man wants to free himself from the sense of guilt and sin, he has to accept love with all its imperfections and weaknesses. Love, therefore, becomes a means to an end. Hence man must make a complete surrender to "Love" to attain his ultimate objective—redemption from sin and anxiety. Poem IX of "*Another Time* makes it clear that only

by surrendering oneself to 'Love' can one go to Eden which is otherwise beyond man's reach.

The original idea of sin has not yet entered Auden's thought, but it comes later. At this stage, the important thing is the acceptance of the human condition as it is, for man is capable of improving it through love. Love, therefore, becomes a source of fulfilment to human beings. This is different from his concept of Love as a Healer, but it takes us in the same direction.

The acceptance of Love with all its limitations and imperfections paves the way for the acceptance of religious faith. Man's awareness of his guilt and his wish to go to Eden can be reconciled only by accepting Love as "Agape". "Agape", as Christianity defines it, is universal, divine and selfless love. Auden's earlier preoccupation with perversion and guilt resulting from repression and suppression of natural desires and unhealthy environment is now connected with the idea of the original sin which transforms the personal and social love into selfless and universal love. Love, therefore becomes all embracing and transcends all limitations, but the recognition of man's simple nature is the first step in that direction, for it is only by accepting his simple nature before God that man can free himself from guilt. But this is possible only with the help of "Agape" which can free him from his nature. It is through Agape that Eros and Logos (Divine love) are united. "Agape requires," Auden wrote in *The Dyer's Hand* "that we love our enemies, do good to those that hate us and forgive those who injure us, and this command is unconditional." Agape, therefore is the highest and the noblest kind of love which not only endears us to fellow human beings but also purifies our souls. Agape or universal love is the theme of "September 1, 1939". It is acclaimed as a great healer and is contrasted with selfish and personal love which is more common :

> For the error bred in the bone
> Of each woman and each man
> Craves what it cannot have
> Not universal love
> But to be loved alone.

Auden wants to show here that Agape is superior to Eros which

is a kind of love we all possess but which leads us to "negation and despair". We should, therefores, rise above Eros and find Agape which is described as "an affirming flame". Since Agape is the Christian concept of Love, Auden feels irresistibly drawn towards Christianity. Religion, therefore, becomes increasingly important to him and, in course of time, replaces Marxism which now seems inadequate and insufficient for man's real needs. Selfless love is the only cure but this kind of love comes from accepting a faith which attaches the greatest importance to love. Christianity therefore, seemed to Auden the only way out of our present suffering. Having accepted Christianity, he emphasizes the need for universal love in his "New Year Letter" which is the first long poem of his religious phase :

We need to love all since we are
Each a uniqe particular
That is no giant, god, or dwarf,
But one odd human isomorph;
We can love each because we know
All, all of us, that this is so:

Love, he describes, as the personification of divine will in his next poem "For the Time Being." One can find love, he asserts, only by surrendering one's will before the divine will. As Gabriel tells Mary

Hear, child, what I am sent to tell
Love wills your dream to happen, so
Love's will on earth may be, through you,
No longer a pretend but true

Thus the reconciliation of the individual will with the divine will is absolutely necessary. This is God's message to man. He sent Christ (the embodiment of divine love) to the earth to convey this message to us. Adam and Eve fell because they could not reconeile their will with the will of God. Though Auden continues to explore new meanings of Love, his concept of Love as a Healer does not change.

The poem called "In Sickness and in Health" also deals with the theme of the weakness and limitation of self-love and the need of redemption through universal and divine love. The

speaker who is a lover feels dissatisfied with the human love because of its imperfection and is keen to achieve true love, but finds it very difficult to do so because of the obstacles and hindrances on the way. He shares these feelings with his beloved.

In the later poems of the fifties and sixties, love as an idea or theme ceases to be Auden's major concern. In fact, with the acceptance of Christianity and the original idea of sin he has arrived at the end of the road and hence, his quest for the meaning of love also comes to an end.

Auden did not write propaganda poetry, but in his advocacy of love as the cure for all evils both in the individual and the society he comes close enough to propaganda. In poem after poem he tried to make love the basis for an ethics. In the early poems he could not make his concept of love quite clear. It was not only vague but changed with almost every poem. But it always remained, in the words of Richard Hoggart, "a form of mental therapy, a gloriously effective psycho-analysis, a liberator, a cleanser, a releasing and enlarging power." It began with the Freudian sense of release from inhibition (or Eros) but soon became the source of all that is 'lucid' and civilized' in human societies. In fact, its concept became so broad that it may best be described in the words of Joseph Warren Beach : "That is a love that thinks not in terms of a one-to-one relationship of reciprocal pleasure-giving, but the larger social relationship in which is sought not personal gratification but the good of the collective body. And in time this concept of a 'disciplined (social) love' gives place to the concept of divine love (Agape as against Eros), where, I suppose, an absolute selflessness is the ideal consummation."

Thus the direction of Auden's poetry one might conclude has been towards defining the concept of love, but as explained above, his quest has been intellectual and not emotional.

QUEST

It was perhaps because of his involvement in this quest that his poetry of the thirties and the forties abounds in the image

of the journey. As Professor Beach remarks, "Of all the poets of the thirties and the forties it is Auden who returns most often to the image of the journey, and it is for him the symbol of several different types of seeking." The object of the journey has however, varied in the different phases; in the early thirties he is preoccupied with the sickness and loveliness of men and so he is in search of something that can bring comfort and solace to them. In his religious poems, the object of the journey becomes more clear; it is now the search for a faith which can bring lasting peace. Thus, though he begins with a social quest, he moves on to metaphysical and religious guests. Since the journey has been the traditional image of the quest, Auden employs it liberally in his poems. But Auden goes a step further: he makes journey the essential condition of human existence. Consequently, his journeymen are determined to find the truth about life and love.

Auden, as has been mentioned earlier, undertook several journies himself to see things happening in various countries. Soon after he left Oxford, he went to Berlin, to Spain, to Iceland, to China and the U.S.A. where he finally settled down looking for 'fresh fields and pastures new'. Even after he settled down in America, he undertook several journies. Besides, his search was also on a mental plane. He explored the various ideologies of his time and adopted them one after another, but he could not get satisfaction until he discovered that it was the Christian faith which could provide him with what he needed. Love, which he found to be the basis of this faith, appealed to him as the panacea for all ills and evils.

In his pre-religious poetry, the journeyman is a kind of a political revolutionary seeking a new order which could replace the sick and the diseased society of England. Later, however, the search is for a faith which could form the basis of the new social order.

In poem V of *Poems 1930* the wanderer who is completely alienated from society is looking for new values but his concern is not political or material; it is the true human condition. As Rica Brenner puts it, "It is in term of human being that he sees the political issue and in terms of human values that he sees the solution. "The basic objective of the quest is moral

evolution and spiritual growth even if it is apparently political or material. This becomes crystal clear in *The Dog Beneath the Skin* where the quest begins as a search for the lost Six Francis Creme, but towards the end it becomes a search for a new political and social order.

The wanderer or the man on a quest is a very common figure in Auden's early poetry. Such a person is held in high esteem as he is engaged in a noble pursuit—the search for a meaning and order in life, and also because he is a man of action and so different from the majority which is indifferent and lethargic, and which actually is responsible for the deplorable state of affairs. Auden is all compassion and sympathy for such a person as he himself was one of such persons. The most remarkable quality about Auden's wanderer is that he goes on unmindful of the difficulties or the hurdles on the way. Even family ties and emotional bonds cannot stop him from undertaking the journey. He is a sort of "a self-willed exile". He is fired with a missionary zeal for he hopes to return with many gains for himself and his countrymen. He is stepping out of a dead past into a bright future, for he will explore new worlds of thought and conduct.

Auden's voyagers usually succeed in reaching their destination inspite of all the dangers, fears and hurdles that confront them. These fears and dangers appear again and again in his poems of the thirties. Temptation also raises its head now and again but the voyager goes on undeterred. Nothing can weaken his determination or unnerve him. In the "Epilogue" to *The Orators*, Fear (which is personified) tries its utmost to unnerve the voyager but it fails, for the seeker is too strong to be unnerved. He is prepared to face all dangers and surmount all difficulties on his way, no matter how formidable. Auden means to indicate that no ordinary coruage is required to undertake journies which are inspired by a quest motive.

Sometimes the journey is inspired by a revolutionary zeal. In poem XXIV of *Poems 1930*, the leader is asked to embark upon his journey immediately and awaken the revolutionary spirit against bourgeois contentment. Auden's rebel, thus, becomes a rebel against the established order. Poem XXV also shows the voyager seeking to destroy the old and usher in a new one.

Often the journey takes place within the mind of the protagonist and leads to a change of heart. Such a journey is a spiritrial progress bringing about a change in vision and outlook, and the person emerges with a cleaner and purer heart. This kind of journey is equally important because in his religious phase the spiritual quest becomes the most important quest, as it brings faith which a person must have for his own good as well as the good of the society in which he has to live. The basic thing to Auden is the change in the social order and the freedom of man from his suffering which is society's gift to him. Man's tensions and anxieties have to be removed, and for this the spiritual quest is most essential.

In the later poems, the quest becomes a religious quest as we find in "The Quest Sonnets" of the *New Year Letter*. Here Auden makes a critical analysis of the problems of quest in the changed conditions brought about by Faith. The problems of the new quest are very different from the problems of the quest of the secular phase. The journey is now undertaken to resolve the subjective dilemmas of the man of faith. Temptations, however, still form the greatest obstacle, and this is the theme of atleast three sonnets of the "Quest" series—Sonnet VI, VII and VIII. The seeker who is now engaged in the pursuit of Truth, still remains unaffected by all the temptations and emotional attachments. He does not allow anything to come between himself and God or Truth. That is why, the quest becomes "conquest" as in *The Ascent of F6* where the Demon is the ruler of the peak Ransom wishes to reach. After he subdues the Demon, Ransom is at peace with himself.

One can clearly see that in the "Quest Sonnets" secular ideology is giving way to theological belief. Now it is only one more step to acceptance of faith. In *The Age for Anxiety*, Auden makes it clear that all our sorrows and sufferings, tensions and conflicts arise from our lack of faith. If, he seems to say, we have to reach the city of God which is the end of all quests, we must develop faith. Faith will give birth to 'Agapa' or universal love which will not only heal us but heal the society in which we live.

Thus we find the theme of quest is taken to its logical conclusion, and hence, we do not find it again in his poetry of

the sixties or even the late fifties where his only concern is a calm realization of Truth in terms of religious meanings. Truth is still his objective, but the quest has ceased. Like his voyagers, he has reached his destination. But the most remarkable thing about Auden is that he brought about a unique synthesis of social, psychological and spiritual quests which for more than three decades formed his theme and his subject-matter.

5

AUDEN AS A PLAYWRIGHT

Auden's first attempt at drama was *Paid on Both Sides* but he called it "A Charade" which means that it is not, strictly speaking, a play, that it has several levels of meaning, and that it is intended to entertain and amuse the readers. Plot and characters, therefore, are not important except for the ideas which they represent.

Paid on Both Sides was written during Auden's visit to Berlin in 1928, and dedicated to C. Day Lewis. It was published in *The Criterion* by T. S. Eliot who soon after wrote to E. Mc Knight : "I have sent you the new *Criterion* to ask you to read a verse play *Paid on Both Sides*, by a young man I know, which seems to me quite a brilliant piece of work. This fellow is about the best poet that I have discovered in several years." This verse play was reprinted in *Poems 1930*.

Paid, however, has seldom been performed on a commercial scale, but it would best be performed, as John Fuller suggests, "by amateurs at a house party as a piece of Christmas Eve therapy, for the piece is most obviously an enigmatic and mythical evaluation of the middle class ethos of its day." The theme of the *Paid* is the feud between the two families—The Nowers and the Shaws—which is temporarily suspended owing to a marriage between John Nower and Ann Shaw, but is soon resumed as the central character gets killed in an ambush instigated by Ann's mother during the wedding party. Auden takes us back to the medieval Iceland of the Sagas which are full of bloody feuds. Auden loved the Sagas but he felt that they described society "with only the gangster virtues". He thought of a saga-hero as a gangster but under Christopher Isherwood's influence, he also identified him with a public

schoolboy since, as one critic suggests, a public school is a special kind of microcosm of the society and because the school athletes are often thought of as brutal, harsh and cruel.

As the play opens, we are informed about the death of John's father, though John is not yet born. His mother, Joan, shocked at the death of his father, delivers the child before time. We are thus introduced to the history of the feud. John's father was killed while he was going to meet Layard. The reference to Layard is important for understanding the real meaning of the play. Layard was a disciple of Homer Lane, the psychologist, and Auden had learnt Lane's psychological theories through him. Joan exhorts both the dead husband and the newly-born child to continue the feud. She looks forward to the day when her son would be able to take up arms against the Shaws. Actually, Joan's appeal is for a social order in which life and tradition can be preserved.

This is followed by a Chorus which responds to Joan's appeal but regrets the absence of a coherent social order. This is not Auden's voice but Sophocles's.

As John grows up he continues the feud and this is where the real action of the play begins. He plans to ambush Red Shaw at Brandon Walls and thus avenge his father's death. After shooting down Red Shaw's son (the Spy), John shouts : " I'll destroy the whole lot of you" which shows that he is determined to continue the feud.

The chorus appears again and dwells at length upon John's falling a prey to traditions and gives a survey of capitalist-dominated society. The chorus also laments the lot of man who desires a happier, more primitive social organization, above everything else.

Auden had learnt from Homer Lane that repression of our natural desires leads to rebellion and that much of our earliest experiences of fear and punishment shape our behaviour. The feud in the *Poid* shows just such a pattern of human behaviour.

Later in the play John and the Spy are identified, which is not difficult to understand as the feud here represents a psychological split in an individual. John stands for the repressive Censor and Spy for the repressed natural desires. John interprets the Spy's death as a form of suicide. He attributes the state of his mind to the decline of western civilization brought

about by the first World War. "Love" is the first casuality in the feud or the War. In a soliloquy John talks about the importance of love as a healing power.

The announcement of John's engagement to Anne Shaw when the feud between the two families is in full swing brings about a temporary peace, but at the marriage party Anne's mother pulls up Seth for not avenging the death of his brother —the Spy. Seth now looks for an opportunity and kills John as soon as he finds one and it seems that the feud will never come to an end.

The play, however, is not simply a re-telling of the feud. It has, as Monroe K. Spears points out, three levels of meaning. First, "the piece presents an image of the essential human condition. By Saga-characters as by Anglo-Saxon warriors or Greek epic heroes, warfare is regarded as man's normal condition and peace as an accidental breathing space. Man constantly faces insecurity and danger; all he can do is to accept his fate bravely. The style helps to convey this meaning."

Second, he suggests, there is the political level of meaning, "In this interpretation, the condition of existence can be changed : the feudal society must be abandoned and things will be different in another country (that is, in a new society)." This new society is the Marxist Society.

Third, he observes, there is a psychological meaning : "Here the chief point is the malignant influence of the mothers who are the chief bearers of the feud and who, from infancy, instil hatred in their sons. In the Father Christmas fantasy in the middle, Joan is warder of the Spy and threatens him with a gigantic feeding bottle ; the reference here may be to the theories of the traumatic effect of weaning, as well as more generally to the Oedipus or Coriolanus complex. . . . To some extent this interpretation fits in with the political, for the new life, traditions of all kinds must be rejected."

Fantasy plays a predominant role in *Paid on Both Sides*. Auden is trying hard to strike a balance between his didactic attitude and his emotional impulse to fantasy. But fantasy takes the upper hand as *Paid* makes use of mythical inventions, dream effects and other expressionistic devices. These were perhaps essential to Auden for this play as he wanted to dramatize here the urge to violence.

Paid employs both verse and prose which has often been criticized. But its stichomythia (dialogue in alternative lines of verse as employed in Greek plays) its chorus and startling interruptions also mar an otherwise commendable attempt.

THE DANCE OF DEATH (1933)

The Dance of Death was Auden's second attempt at drama. But this was written for performance at the Group Theatre which he had himself founded alongwith Robert Medley and Rupert Doone. Later, it was also performed at the Westminister Theatre with Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* in 1935.

Auden expressed his views on Drama in a programme note circulated at the performance of this play :

"Drama began as the act of a whole community. Ideally there would be no spectators. In practice every member of the audience should feel like an understudy.

"Drama is essentially an art of the body. The basis of acting is acrobatics, dancing and all forms of physical skill. The music-hall, the christmas pantomime, and the country house charade are the most living drama of today."

The Dance of Death, therefore, involves the audience in the action and with all its dancing looks like a ballet. The dancer's role was written for Rupert Doone who himself danced the main role. The actors do not appear on the stage which is kept empty except for the music orchestra. The only person who appears on the stage is the theatre manager. The actors are planted among the audience and the announcer acts as the mediator between the stage and the audience. Auden seems to have been influenced by Bertolt Brecht whose plays he had seen in Berlin during his visit in 1928-29. Brecht's plays had a political bias, used song and light verse and involved the audience in the action. Folk ballad was deeply rooted in German tradition ; Brecht made it the principal element of his verse. Auden used most of Brecht's techniques and himself acknowledged his debt to the German playwright. (*see* John Willet's book *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*). Auden also collaborated with Brecht in an adaptation of *The Duchess of Malfi.* He even translated some of Brecht's works into English.

The theme of *The Dance of Death* is the decline of the capitalist class, as the announcer makes it explicit :

"We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old : for there is death inside them. We show you that Death as a dancer."

The Dance, thus, is a propaganda play and the most extreme of Auden's Marxist writings. During the early thirties Auden came very close to being a Marxist. It is, therefore, not surprising that he made Marxism the theme of the play he wrote during this period. His poems of the period also show a marked influence of Karl Marx.

In *The Dance* Auden makes use of the allegorical device. The chorus are the bourgeois, the Dancer is the Death-wish and the Manager is the Capitalist class, the audience is the proletariat and the Announcer, rationalism. When the Dancer steals the clothes of the chorus, the Manager replaces them with Military uniforms. But the chorus resent this and provoked by the audience they start preparing themselves for revolution, but they are persuaded by the Announcer to revolt against "the dictatorship of the international capital." The Chorus, therefore, go and assualt the Manager. Arranging themselves into the figure of a ship, they mime a journey but the rocks and storms impede their progress. In the meantime, the Dancer (or the death-wish) is struck by an epileptic fit and is therefore advised to go slow. The chorus, in turn, look inward and try to follow various forms of the inner life but mystic powers are beyond their reach as they come from the bourgeois class. The Dancer now tries to escape as a pilot into the very heart of Reality but meets the same fate as the Airman in the Orators. The Manager now steps in and announces the formation of a nightclub called the "Alma Mater" which the audience make on the stage with the purpose of providing a panacea, but the atmosphere becomes unfavourable for capitalism whose death-knell is sounded as Karl Marx declares at the Dancer's Corpse: "The instruments of production have been too much for him. He is liquidated."

Auden has made parodies of several popular songs in this play. Here is one of the funniest parodies :

> You were a great cunarder, I
> was only a fishing smack

Once you passed across my bows
And of course you did not look back
It was only a single moment yet
I watch the sea and sigh
Because my heart can never forget
The day you passed me by.

But *The Dance of Death* is not very interesting as poetry. This is borne out by the fact that Auden included no extracts from it either in *The Collected Poetry* (1945) or *Collected Shorter Poems* (1950). This play was in fact, intended to be a parody of a musical comedy. But this play was not received well by critics. Kenneth Allott wrote in *New Verse* of November, 1937: "I think it is the worst thing Auden has done. Its over simplification is certainly its main weakness. Things are much too obvious. The language is also, as Spears puts it, 'uncharacteristically thin and unidimensional, and its chief defeat is "that it is too close in style to what it satirizes, too popular and simple, while at the same time too varied and unfocused as satire, so that what starts out as a macabre and powerful concept winds up as good clean fun." *The Dance*, however, remains an important experiment in didactic theatre. It also looks forward to the next play, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, especially in its borrowings from music-hall and cabaret.

THE DOG BENEATH THE SKIN (1935)

Auden wrote this play in collaboration with his friend Christopher Isherwood, but most of it is his own. Both Auden and Isherwood had been greatly impressed by the purposive nature of Brecht's theatre and its interest in social reality. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* is the first example of this influence. It opens in the manner of a musical comedy and this manner continues throughout the play.

A young man named Alan Norman is chosen by the people of the village Pressan Ambo in accordance with the wishes of the late Squire Sir Bingham Crewe to go in search of his son, Sir Francis Crewe, who had left his house following a quarrel with his father. As Alan is about to set out with his dog 'Francis', the chorus invoke Love to accompany him on his journey. Love is seen here as the bewitched fairy-tale figure

who accompanies the hero helping him in need and then, it expresses a desire to be restored to its original shape.

Alan's journey has all the logic of a dream. John Fuller suggests that some of the scenes show a direct influence of Lewis Caroll. While Alan is moving towards Ostnia (which typifies the Europe of the post-war period), in a boat, he meets two cynical journalists. This scene, with its beautiful dialogues and under-current of light farce, sets the tone of the play. The three reach Ostnia where he sees the political upheavals and executions in a reactionary bourgeois country. The Red Light area exposes poverty and deprivation which are really heart-rending.

Alan's search for the missing Francis Crewe next leads him to Westland where he witnesses the ends of a society under a fascist dictatorship. His search also takes him to a Westland lunatic asylum. This scene provides a fine satire on German nationalism. (The Nazis are treated as lunatics). Alan is rescued from the lunatic asylum by his journalist companions. As they are moving out of Westland, a financier named Grabstein asks Alan to try Paradise Park. Alan sees here various forms of escape from life. The hospital scene picturises the sickness of modern society. Nineveh Hotel where Alan stays symbolizes a permissive society and excesses of the capitalists. The cabaret scene and the seduction symbolize the vulgarity of modern culture. The cabaret star with whom Alan falls in love and who later turns out to be a dummy, reminds one of Lawrence's 'sex-in-the-head'. The dog himself who has been Alan's companion on the journey is found out to be Sir Francis Crewe himself. When he reaches Pressan Ambo along with Alan, he tells the people that, in the disguise of a dog, he had come to know how they treated those whom they considered their inferiors.

"... ..with what a mixture of fear, bullying, and condescending kindness you treat those whom you consider your inferiors, but on whom you are dependent for your pleasures. It's an awful shock to start seeing people from underneath."

The chorus impress upon the people the need of choosing a society.

> "Where grace may grow outward and be given parise
> Beauty and virtue be vivid there."

The search for the missing heir is thus identified with the search for a better society. Even after Sir Francis Crewe is found, the quest continues, now led by Francis himself. It is not the person but the quest that matters. As the play draws to an end, the animal-fable theme is carried on ; the fascists and the villagers wear animal masks and make animal noises, indicating thereby that they are more unpleasant animals than the dog.

The comic invention of the play makes it very lively and entertaining. It has a great variety of songs and other musical compositions which bring it very close to a musical comedy. Symons remarked that *The Dog Beneath of Skin* as performed in 1935 was immensely enjoyable but it "did not merely employ the technique of 'modern musical comedy', it *was* that musical comedy ; or something so near it that the edge of satire was indiscernible." Spears suggests that the title of this play parodies Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality" : "Instead of the skull, the vision of death, this will reveal the dog beneath the skin, the qualities and needs man shares with the animals, even the proverbially low dog whose name is the reverse of "god" . . . . The metaphor of the 'underdog' can also be read in the title."

The Dog is thus a curious mixture of morality play, satire, invective ahd buffoonery. The episodes are presented in the manner of a musical comedy with song, dance and chorus. Auden shows here the same mastery over choric verse as Eliot had done in *The Rock*. His choruses range from long choric speeches, with their social commentary, to the semi-choruses, with their quick rhythm and occasional wit. The best of Auden's choruses are highly moving as he uses them to satirize modern Europe. But Auden could not "weld the chorus into the framework of drama" as successfully as Eliot had done. The play, therefore, remains as Beach puts it, "a set of loosely strung episodes made up largely of music-hall songs." John Blair made a similar observation when he described the play as "a tableaux without adequate interrelation or logical sequence."

Moreover, the play is a "period-piece" as it is preoccupied with attacking the evils of the time. Our only interest now is in the poetry which is some of the best that Auden wrote during his early phase. Some readers may also read it for its parodies and the Sermon. The two themes that are closely related to

the poetry are the themes of psychosomatic illness (which Auden learnt from Homer Lane who believed that every disease has a psychological origin) and of love as escape or as disguised self-love.

The Dog appeared the same year as Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, and though both the plays attempted to restore poetry to drama, and contained a message, they pointed to entirely different directions—one was religious and the other political. While Eliot's play concluded with a piece of the Christian liturgy, Auden's play ended with the communist manifesto :

> To each his need : from each his power.

THE ASCENT OF F6, A TRAGEDY IN TWO ACTS (1936)

Auden wrote his next play also in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, but it was dedicated to his brother, John Bicknell Auden, a mountaineer. *The Ascent of F6* is a fairly well-knit play and shows considerable progress in Auden's skill as a playwright. It has a well-defined plot, and a prominent dramatic conflict, and satire is relegated to a secondary place. It is a tragedy in two acts in which a serious psychological problem is developed in terms of dramatic action. Musical element has also been cut down and hence, the play comes quite close to the traditional dramatic form. Though the essential action is psychological and takes place inside Ransom's mind, the central action of Ransom to climb F6 resembles that of a conventional play.

In plain words, the theme of the play, as the title indicates, is the ascent of a mountain known as F6 in British Sudoland. But in climbing the mountain, the leader of the expedition, Michael Ransom, like Alan Norman in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, is involved in a kind of quest. In his very first soliloquy, Michael explains his love of mountaineering as an escape from the real world which he finds sordid and corrupt beyond redemption. Essentially a man of action, Michael, like Ulysses, is driven by an urge "to follow knowledge like a sinking star". He regrets that the world instead of being motivated by virtue and knowledge is motivated by power. He wonders if his own action of climbing the mountain would not be construed as a lust for power. His conviction that the renunciation of

the will is itself an act of will completes his dilemma. But towards the end of the play he remarks :

'F6 has shown me what I am

Obviously, the general emphasis of the play is on self-knowledge. Michael's mother plays an important part in his motivation. She had given all her love to his twin brother James and deliberately withheld it from him so that he may grow into an independent and truly strong man, for her conviction was that "the truly strong man is he who stands alone." But this attitude of his mother, instead of making him strong and independent, makes him jealous of his brother. He also develops an unconscious desire to get close to his mother. This is reflected in his climbing the mountain which becomes a symbol for his mother's breasts. Thus it is his Oedipus Complex which drives him to mountaineering.

But Michael's quest is not only for himself, he is equally concerned with the salvation of society. In his effort to end the despair of society, he becomes its liberator and, therefore, a hero. His reward is his own salvation which he achieves through the discovery of his mother who is the demon at the peak of F6.

Ransom's game of chess with his brother symbolizes the struggle for power. His brother is the dragon and stands for imperialism. F6 symbolizes political power, as the legend was that the first man to reach the summit will rule both British and Ostnian Sudoland. Power, thus, is the ultimate motive; power which will make up for a nation's lack of the twin qualities of virtue and knowledge, symbolized in the play by Mr. and Mrs. A, who are bored with their existence and who deliver choral commentaries on their dull and unhappy lives. They derive a vicarious pleasure from the newspaper account of Ransom's adventure.

The influence of expressionistic drama on *The Ascent of F6* can be seen in several scenes, particularly in the death scene of Gunn and the scene in which Ransom and Abbot meet. Both the scenes are highly successful and dramatically very effective. No less interesting is Ransom's meeting with a monk who has a mysterious crystal in which they see reflections of their lives. The mystical halo which surrounds Michael Ransom's character

owes much to Isherwood's great interest in mysticism and eastern philosophy.

The authors's concern with the creation of myth makes it a truly poetic drama. The symbolism of the play is another important point, for it gives it an allegorical pattern. John Fuller suggests that the four companions of Ransom symbolize his four faculties—Instuition, Feeling, Sensation and Thought. Intuition is represented by the Doctor, Feeling by Shawcross, Sensation by Gunn and Thought by Lamp. (One would recall a similar splitting of a man's personality in *The Age of Anxiety*).

The psychological aspect of the play has been ignored by most critics, but it is central to the understanding of the play. Louis Mac Neice remarks :

"Auden being so interested in the phenomenon of the man of action, many of his lyrics contain in condensed form what is worked out at length in the play *F6*—the tragedy of man who gets his own way. But Auden, while regarding so many of our neuroses as tragic, so many of our actions as self-deception, yet believes as I have already said, that neurosis is the cause of an individual's development. Such a psychological dialectic reflects itself in the paradoxes and the tensions of his poems."

Thus, there are different themes and different levels at which the play works, but the authors expect us to believe that it has an essential unity. This is not easy to concede as there seems to be no connection between Ransom's death which is psychological and religious, and the rest of the play in which James and Mr. and Mrs A act the leading roles. The only possible link is the corrupting effect of power. Often diverse elements run together and betray the author's lack of control over them. Absence of singleness of purpose and 'radical incoherence' are its main defects. Raymond Williams finds fault with the tone of the play also. He says "The tone of the work (*The Ascent of F6*) as a whole is strangely uncertain even at times defensive. It is not easy to be certain whether one is watching a Dance of the Seven Veils or Simple Commercial Strip-tease." The authors also mix-up contrasting levels of poetry. Mr. and Mrs. A chant

> Moments of happiness do not come often,
> Opportunity is easy to miss.

O, let us seize them, of all their joy squeeze them.
For Monday returns when none may kiss.

And as the play reaches its climax, mark the bathos in the following lines

Do you think it was easy
To shut you out ? I who yearned to make
My heart the cosiest nook in all the world
And warm you there for ever, so to leave you
Stark to the indifferent blizzard and the lightning ?

Prof. Beach remarks that most of the verse in the play is "decidedly pedestrian". There is certainly some truth in the statement because even Auden could find only two pieces in it suitable for reprinting in his *Collected Poetry*.

But for all its weaknesses, *The Ascent of F6* was, as Ashley Dukes puts it, "very nearly a great play". It is certainly the least confused and the most tightly constructed of Auden's plays. In spite of the obvious influence of Eliot in style and versification, it shows greater originality than *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. The transition from prose to verse is skilfully made and the use of verse is reserved for moments of crisis. Denis Donoghue calls this play "*drama a these*" (that is, a drama with a purpose) and considers the ascent of the demon-haunted mountain an allegory of man's spiritual quest.

ON THE FRONTIER (1938)

On the Frontier was Auden's last play written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood. It is much simpler and is also free from private allusions which mar the earlier plays. But it is the most topical of all their plays as it dramatizes the condition of Europe at this time affected by the Spanish war and the Sino-Japanese conflict. Whereas *The Ascent of F6* had been called 'A Tragedy', *On the Frontier* is called 'A Melodrama'. It has a number of sung choruses and songs of various kinds including burlesque, martial and soldier songs, but its base is political satire and a minor descant on love.

The meaning of the title, however, becomes clear only in the second scene of the first act which is laid in a room, one-half of which is in Ostnia and the other half in Westland. (Notice

the Expressionistic setting). Ostnia is a decadent monarchy and Westland, as in the *Dog Beneath the Skin*, a fascist dictatorship. (Both are imaginary countries and appear in all the Auden-Isherwood plays). The people of Ostnia are conservative and those of Westland progressive. Their rivalry becomes obvious in the course of their conversation. A border accident causes excitement among the people and an exaggerated radio report adds fuel to the fire.

The artificial barrier between the two countries, however, makes no difference to the lovers—Eric Thorvald and Anna Vrodney (who belong to a bourgeois family from each country) as can be seen in the following lines :

> This is the good place
> Where the air is not filled with screams of hatred.
> No words of great and good men twisted
> To flatter conceit and justify murder.
> Here are no family quarrels and public meetings,
> No diseases or old age. No death.
> Here we can be really alone,
> Alone with our love, our faith, our knowledge,
> I've struggled for this ever since I saw you.

In the last scene, however, we find Eric and Anna on their death-bed from which they rise for a while to conjure up for us a vision of the future

> But in the lucky guarded future
> Others like us shall meet, the frontier gone,
> And find the real world happy.

But the background of the play is provided by the class-struggle between the workers and the capitalist Valerian, head of the Westland Steel Trust. The play opens with a chorus of eight workers waiting, as it were, for the gate of the factory to open :

> The clock on the wall gives an electric tick,
> I'm feeling sick brother; I'm feeling sick.
> The sirens blow at eight; the sirens blow at noon;
> Goodbye, sister, goodbye; we shall die soon.

But in their concluding verses, they chant this communist message :

Stoke up the fires in furnace number three;
The day is coming, brother, when we shall all be free !

The scenes of the play are laid either in the Capilalist's study or in the room on the frontier. But whereas the people on the frontier live in fear, the Capitalist has no such obsession. Yet he feels lonely and longs for his past when he was humble and free. The subject-matter of the play is amazingly realistic: there are vivid references to industrialists, bankers, motor-tyres, barbed wires, hand grenades etc. It is so topical, in fact, that it hardly interests the present-day reader. But when it was produced by the Group Theatre in 1938, it was rated very highly. Some critics even found it the best of the three plays Auden wrote with Isherwood. Francis Scarfe in his book on Auden written in 1949 described *On the Frontier* as the best of all his plays.

There is no doubt that it is the most straightforward, least confused and best constructed of all the five plays of Auden. But it has less poetry, and Auden could not find any piece from it for his *Collected Poetry*. Nevertheless, it has very remarkable songs of workers, prisoners, soldiers and of male and female dancers. There is also some beautiful verse spoken by the lovers. But here too, as in the other two plays written with Isherwood, there is an admixture of prose and verse, and as Ernest Reynold remarks "frequently one is not sure which is which". Often it is the typographical arrangement of the lines which distinguishes the poetry from the prose.

But both Auden and Isherwood were addressing themselves to the leftist audiences and so what they were mainly concerned with was the materialist interpretation of history. The symbolic roles of Eric and Anna stand out against the realistic-naturalistic texture. But the author's message is most unambiguous: "The present weapon of the workers is strike, but it will soon be replaced by actual fighting !"

Thus it is a clear piece of propaganda and is not marred or complicated by psychological or religious approaches. John Fuller, however, regretted the absence of myth in it and added that, "it is a play which leaves no clear images in the mind." The choruses too are brief and not involved in the main action as in the earlier palys. However, Isherwood tells us that

"there is more of Auden's work in *On the Frontier* than any of the plays, because he not only wrote all the poetry but a big share of prose."

So Auden wrote no more plays after *On the Frontier*. The most unfortunate thing about his play is that they were rooted in their time and therefore, were meant for "immediate consumption". In fact, they are so much concerned with the nineteen thirties that today their appreciation has become very difficult. They are revolutionary plays and they appeared very exciting in a revolutionary age. Today they look like the documentaries of the inglorious thirties. This point is best explained by Raymond Williams :

"A substantial part of each of the three plays could . . . be described in the narrow sense as a living newspaper : Certainly these parts share with newspapers their impermanence of interest . . . it is a matter of regret that such bold experiments and such lively dramatic talents, should have been so limited in success, not only by the absence of adequate conventions, but also by the extraneous pre-occupations of a strange decade."

Although these plays are not of any lasting importance, yet they made a definite contribution to Poetic Drama which had been struggling hard ever since the beginning of our century to recover the lost ground. *Paid on Both Sides* is considered as important an influence on the Poetic Drama of the ninteen-thirties as *Sweeney Agonistes*. Both Eliot and Auden believed that the music-hall and the ritual of the Mass could give new direction to English poetic drama which was otherwise a dying art form. Auden contributed three well-known plays for the Group Theatre which had been founded with the avowed aim of performing "original verse drama in the English language". But the leftist leanings of the poets, who rallied round the Group Theatre gave their plays a documentary touch. They became so much engrossed with the political issues of the time that they forgot their original purpose in writing plays, in spite of the leading role that Eliot had been playing in reviving poetic drama.

Nevertheless, Auden's contribution to the new Poetic Drama was not insignificant. His plays are fine examples of a lively form of verse drama. They are also novel experiments in the

use of mass cultural forms as dramatic framework. Besides, they interpret contemporary life in contemporary speech rhythms. By employing the technique of the revue and the musical comedy, Auden gave his audiences the sensation of listening to new and exciting music. His political themes and lots of songs and light verse reminded one of the "epic theatre" of Bertolt Brecht. Eric Bentley went so far as to call Auden's plays "imitations of Bertolt Brecht". The "epic theatre", according to Brecht is different from the "dramatic theatre" in its refusal to create a dramatic illusion for the spectator to escape. The writer of the "epic theatre" does not represent action on the stage but only narrates the sequence of events. He often steps in to remind the audience that what they are witnessing is only an illusion and they need not identify themselves with the characters. Whereas the "dramatic theatre" involved the audience in the action, the "epic theatre" treats him only as an observer. The "epic theatre" plays thus resemble the old morality plays and are intended to appeal to the minds and not the emotions of the audience.

Auden tried Brecht's way of writing plays but he also assimilated various other influences and developed a style of his own. Auden had the makings of a major playwright, and Isherwood too had the training of a novelist but they become so much involved with the political issues that they used their plays as means of mass communication and hence, ignored the development of character and conflict. Most of their characters are only "stock characters" and the conflict is often conspicuous by its absence. They appeal to the minds but do not touch the emotions which a drama is expected to do. This led John Bradbury to remark that Auden's plays are dramatic without being drama.

It is a matter of great regret that such a great dramatic talent as Auden did not leave a single play of permanent interest and could not become a model for later playwrights even in his special kind of theatre.

6

AUDEN AS A MODERN POET

Auden was the most important and influential English poet after Eliot, and remained so until his death in 1973. In 1970 John Fuller remarked that "for breadth, wisdom, myth, moral power and sheer technical excitement, he is the greatest living poet writing in English". But Auden's reputation has not always been the same. When he began writing poetry, critics saw in him a poet of great promise, a prodigy, a Messiah, and recognized him as the leader of a literary group committed to a radical political programme. But those who had pinned their hopes on his political leadership became disillusioned when Auden renounced Marxism, went back to the christian fold, and started writing religious poetry. His migration to America made the critics very bitter who soon started pulling him down from the high pedestal on which they themselves had placed him.

F. R. Leavis was the first to tear his reputation to pieces. Commenting on *The Orators* in 1933 he observed that it was an ominous falling off from the poems of 1930, and jumped to the conclusion that Auden had no future as a poet. Leavis's followers continued the assault. Chief among these was R. G. Lienhardt who wrote in a review of "For the Time Being" in 1945: "Auden's only claim to importance rests on effects produced almost casually in his early work" and clinched the issue by saying that Auden had the "mental equipment only of a minor poet". Richard Hoggart who was the first to publish a full length study of Auden saw him largely through Lienhardt's eyes.

American critics were not to lag behind. Randell Jarrell attacked him for his 'ideologies' and found in his poetry a

marked deterioration unbecoming a major poet. Joseph Warren Beach, picking up where Jarrell left, described Auden as a poet "uncertain of his own identity" and basing his contention on Auden's constant revisions and alterations, dismissed him as "careless, irresponsible and frivolous", and without any development as a poet.

In short, Auden was criticized mainly on five grounds : (1) for leaving his political programme and betraying the people who had high hopes from him ; (2) for migrating to America and writing religious poetry; (3) for his ideologies which were described as "a series of rationalizations of his own psychological peculiarities"; (4) for his constant revisions and corrections which raised the question of the poet's identity ; and (5) for not being able to keep up the high standard of his poetry, and for having the mental equipment only of a minor poet. We shall examine the charges in detail and see how they are borne out by facts.

As regards the first charge, namely of leaving politics and betraying his countrymen, it may be pointed out that when Stephen Spender asked him as to why he had left politics, Auden replied : "In the 1930s I thought that war could be stopped by opposing Fascism. We failed to do this, so I realized that subsequently nothing that I could do would be effective". Thus it was only proper that Auden withdrew from politics when he felt that he could not serve any useful purpose by remaining in it.

As regards the second charge that his migration to America was an unpatriotic act and that it brought about a decline in his poetry, one has to know that Auden did not leave England out of despair or disguest with the English scene. There was no imminent danger of war at the time (Jan 1939) when Auden left England. In fact, as John Press said, it was a time when "the prospects of peace had never been brighter". Actually Auden left because of his conviction that "aloneness is man's real condition". As Stephen Spender put it : "Auden's journey to America was not, as it seemed to many people at the time, an escape from the consequences of anti-fascism which he had supported, but an attempt to rediscover his own isolation." Edmand Wilson finding that Auden's migration to America did not affect the basic qualities of his character wrote : " . . . the

influence of America does not seem to me in the least to have diluted the Englishness of Auden or to have changed its essential nature. Auden's genius is basically English." Auden, no doubt retained his British character to the last but he found England too small a country, too domestically intimate and with much too homely a cultural life. He needed a large urban setting and a kind of anonymity which a big city like New York alone could provide him. Besides, America gave him a more detached attitude which he was trying to cultivate from the very beginning.

The suggestion that his migration to America weakened his poetry is particularly malicious as it comes mainly from those who felt outraged at his unpatriotic act. In fact, Auden's course of development as a poet would have remained the same even if he had stayed on in England. His writing of religious poetry was not something sudden which came with his migration to America. He was inclined towards religious poetry from the very beginning, but the central religious problem of his work was to some extent shelved (as happened with nearly all the serious writers of the 1930s) by political activities which seemed more important in that decade. As Monroe K. Spears writes, "Auden's religious position is not a denial but a fulfillment of his earlier beliefs ; the religious values do not contradict the others, but clarify them and take them to another level."

Thus Auden's return to Christanity was not as sudden as it seemed to many a critic. In an essay published in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*, Auden described at length the devout Anglo-catholic atmosphere of his home and asserted that he was accustomed to doctrinal and liturgical controversies from his earliest years. He grew up with a uniquely Anglican conception of the church as a community in which wide divergences of doctrine and rite can, and do exist, without leading necessarily to schism or ex-communication." After he was thirteen, he lost interest in religion, as most boys do at this age, but he continued to sing in his school choirs both as a student and as a teacher. Even when his interests were political he was deeply concerned with the nature of man and the causes of his individual and social problems. In the thirties this concern took him to the study of psychology, to Freud and Homer Lane and Groddeck. He became particularly interested

in idyllic surroundings but everything there ignored it. The ploughman who heard the splash and the agonising cry of pain did not consider it an important failure. The sun shone on a pair of white legs disappearing into the green water as the ship which saw the boy fall out of the sky sailed leisurely along.

The leisurely and casual tone of the poem is in consonance with its argument which Auden develops in an ironical and detached manner. Auden's detachment from his subject is characterictic of the artistic detachment of the great painters who depicted such soul stirring situations.

'Musee de Beaux Arts' is a beautiful lyrical poem which contains the music and harmony of a casual but compact piece of conversation. Its melody seems to drift and disappear in space like the faint echo of a musical sound just heard. The poem has the capacity to impinge itself on the mind of the reader with its supple argument, casual tone and music.

5. Consider

'Consider' was first published in *Poems*, 1930, and was also later included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950. It is a controversal poem of Auden and is both admired and criticised vastly.

The poem shows a strong impact of Marx and modern psychology on Auden. The poem is daring in its imagery and in depicting in concrete terms the malaise of the modern effete civilisation. Auden draws heavily on Freudian psychology to select his metaphors and phrases to present the psychopathetic condition of the modern man overlaying which are also political implications and forebodings of a catastrophe.

Using the cinematic technique, also known as *montage*, Auden creates an impressive image—"As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman"—to present a panoramic overview of the diseased and decayed world. We are shown a highly artificial world; 'the cigarette-end smouldering on the border,' and a garden party. Then comes into view an assorted gathering in a winter sport hotel, looking trapped by their superficial sense of entertainment and relying pitifully on the hotel band for the

supply of their feelings. Finally the scene shifts to the country-side where the music of the band is relayed to farmers 'sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens'.

The dovetailing of the images in the first section of the poem is very effective. It becomes a compact though shifting set of images and contributes to the singleness of impression that Auden wants the poem to make.

Having cleverly made an impact on the mind of the reader, Auden starts sounding the depths and comes to grips with his subject in the second section of the poem.

The 'Supreme Antagonist' which has been interpreted as death and Satan, is shown at work with the modern world. The 'Supreme Antagonist' has separated man from his surroundings and from the rest of the animal kingdom which has led to the suppression of the natural desires and instincts of man. And such a suppression, apart from causing a chasm in the human society, has also created a psychopathetic condition for man. The rich industrialists and capitalists—'the highborn mining captains'—have heard the comments of the 'Supreme Antagonist' and are overcome with a wish to die. They have failed to find an answer to the enigma of the forces of decay which have menacingly beseiged their world. There is decay and sickness all around :

> You talk to your admirers everyday
> By silted harbours, derelict works,
> In strangled orchards, and a silent comb
> Where dogs have wounded or a bird was shot.

Everything in this world has fallen off from its hinges. The scene is as dreary as a grave yard.

The 'Supreme Antagonist' is invited by the poet to visit the ports where the 'Supreme Antagonist' disturbs the conversation in the bar and summons the members of the corrupt and diseased society :

> Those handsome and diseased youngesters, those women
> Your solitary agents in the country parishes . . . .

'The Supreme Antagonist' infects the soul which makes the farmer brutal, spreads disease and destruction. He is also bidden by the poet to start his rumour which would produce a

catastrophe—'A polar peril, a prodigious alarm'—and a social break-up 'scattering the people, as torn-up paper. . . .' and a 'neurotic dread'.

The third section of the poem spells the doom in more positive terms. The capitalists and 'seekers after happiness' will realise that it is too late for their survival and cure—'It is later than you think'. The forces of decay and destruction have gone too far to leave any hope for the modern world. Auden visualises the political, social and economic set-up of the world as hopelessly doomed, beyond redemption.

Auden concludes the poem with references to a number of psychic ailments :

> the prey to fughes,
> Irregular breathing and alternate ascendencies
> After some haunted migratory years
> To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
> Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.

Although the poem succeeds in making an impression of disorder, chaos and impending destruction by virtue of its unusually powerful and violent images hurled across its darkling environment, it suffers from the fault of obscurity which seems unnecessary and unwarranted. The reader has a feeling of being cheated in not being allowed a closer look into the picture of the world which Auden creates in the poem because of the escoteric references and vague expressions. Also, the superabundance of psycholical terms and the mention of psychic conditions in the concluding lines weighs down the poem.

6. The Unknown Citizen

'The Unknown Citizen', first published in the *Listener*, on August 3, 1939, and later included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950, mildly satirises and even laments the predicament of the average modern man in a merchantile society ridden heavily by the mores of technocratic, bureaucatic and other regimented establishments.

The poem is written in a humorous and light vein in which

Auden, tongue in cheek, presents the picture of the modern man whose life is declared a success by the narrow and rigid standards dictated and enforced by the 'Establishment'. The protagonist of the poem conformed strictly to the pattern of life around him :

> He was found by the Bureau of statistics to be
> One against whom there was no complaint,
> And all the reports on his conduct agree
> That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
> For everything he did he served the Greater Community.

In an undeceiving and straight forward manner Auden implies that in such a society where man has to live for the 'Greater Community' his individuality is annihilated. Man becomes a mere mechanical adjunct to the various social and economic institutions which imperceptibly take control of him.

In the modern society man is forced to fulfil ridiculous obligations to his 'employers', 'Union', 'Social Psychology' and 'The Press' etc. The subtle irony which Auden employs here is that it is such obligations that give the modern man's existence a definition and shape.

The central figure of the poem was meticulous even about the number of children he produced :

> He was married and added five children to the population,
> Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation.

Auden builds up his satire to the minutest detail.

It is only at the end that Auden raises the searching and fundamental questions about the existence of this successful modern man :

> Was he free ? Was he happy ?

The ironical answer to these questions which are posed in a serious manner (the only serious words in the poem) is:

> Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

The success of man in a commercialised society does not go together with happiness. In fact, the consideration of happiness

is quickly set aside as something 'absurd', for all that matters in such a world is how closesly and blindly one can conform to its standards.

The theme of conformity and absence of individuality which Auden has treated of in the poem is typically a modern concern which finds expression in the writings of several modern writers.

'The Unknown Citizen' is written in a clear and simple style and is free from obscure references which we find in a considerable measure in Auden's poetry. It makes its appeal effectively by virtue of its simplicity, directness and the humorous vein. It constitutes a true and sincere commentary on an aspect of the life of the modern man to which he will have to give a serious thought before it is too late.

7. Victor

'Victor' first appeared in *New Writing*, Autumn 1937, and was also later included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950. The poem, written in popular ballad form and using a delicate and fine mixture of tragi-comic elements, shows Auden as the acknowledged modern master of comic verse. The clever handling of the theme in the poem testifies to the fact that Auden is equally adept in dealing with non-serious subjects as with the serious subjects of his poems. His technical virtuosity and the capacity to bring different shades of moods into play is evident in 'Victor'.

The poem embodies the dangerous effects of the suppression of natural (sexual) instincts and the morbidity of the mind resulting from such a repression. This is the main psychological level at which the theme of the poem is dealt with. But we must not lose sight of the fact that there are other levels also at which Auden makes his poem operatable.

The morbidity of Victor stems from his doctrinal and forbiddingly religious background.

> His father took him on his knee and said :
> 'Don't dishonour the family name'. . . .
> His father said; 'Victor, my only son,
> Don't you ever tell lies.'

So, Victor is a product of his puritan upbringing. The irony inherent in the situation of Victor is the seriousness with which he takes his religious indoctrination and his total incapacity to apply it to his life. This is the second level at which Auden treats of his theme; he shows his impatience of the kind of religion which breeds hypocrisy and fails to bear fruit in practical life.

Auden works his ironical effects around the details and touches of religion in the poem. The promiscuous Anna

> looked as pure as a schoolgirl
> On her First Communion day.

Further :

> Victor went upto his bedroom,
> Set the alarum bell;
> Climbed into bed, took his Bible and read
> Of what happened to Jezebel.

The irony deepens when Victor imagines himself to be the Son of Man (Christ) and that he would come 'to judge the earth one day'. It also carries a strong suggestion of Victor's lurking guilt which seems to be the cause of his madness. Religion, instead of protecting him against guilt, proves to be his undoing.

The plot of the narrative of the poem is compact and well developed. The narrative has been presented with all the necessary details and enriched by the touches of irony issuing from psychological and religious factors.

While in its bare contents the story of Victor is tragic, the total effect of the poem is comic. Auden keeps himself detached from the subject which is an essential quality of a comic writer. By his humorous touches Auden keeps his reader also from becoming feelingly involved in the central situation of the poem and thereby succeeds in sustaining the comic effect throughout.

The presentation of the narrative is melodramatic : the exaggeration with which the pursuit and the murder of the victim is described.

Auden is perfectly at home with the ballad form of the poem. The style, tone, imagery and rhyme are suited to the form.

Auden employs the four-lined stanza with lines rhyming alternately and makes the tone of the poem dramatic. The imagery of mountains, snow, oaks and beeches, and the sweeping wind lends a touch of exotic romance to the ballad.

8. Diaspora

'Diaspora' a sonnet, constituted a part of *The New Year Letter*, published in 1941. Later it found its place in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950. Diaspora means the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles after the Babylonian captivity.

In his sonnet Auden has treated of the theme of the scattering and the mythological wandering of the Jews consequent on the curse of God on them. The theme has been dealt with with a clever and oblique gloss on the rise of the regime of Hitler, and the punishment and persecution of the Jews at his hands. Allied to the theme of the dispersion of the Jews is also the important strand of thought that the Jews have suffered all these ages from a sense of guilt which seems to infect the whole mankind. Auden brilliantly expands the idea of the guilt of the Jews to the sense of the guilt of mankind in general—a sense of guilt which has led man to self-mortification, sacrifices and also vengeance from time to time.

The Jews who crucified Christ could never understand how the message and teachings of Christ would ever live after him. They had never imagined the consequences of the crucifixion. They lost their land under the curse of God. They tortured and beggard Christ to prove it themselves that they needed the religion and their land to exist.

No worlds or lands were big enough for the teachings of Christ which spread in every corner of the earth. Jehovah, God of the Jews, commanded them not to set any limits to their love, but they displayed their narrow-minded fanaticism in putting Christ to death:

> No worlds they drove him from were ever big enough :
> How could it be the earth the unconfined
> Meant when It bade them set no limits to their love ?

The earth is 'unconfined', of limitless range ; hence Jehovah

commanded the Jews not to bound their love by sects and creeds. The limitlessness of the earth is also proved by the widespread gospel of Christ.

Christ made the sacrifice and atoned for the sins of mankind —'And he fulfilled the role for which he was designed'. He took the fears and vindictive passions of the Jews upon himself and made them a part of his sacrifice. He was sent by God to serve and love the 'lowest of mankind'.

The Jews did all that they could to Christ—crucified him and destroyed him. Then they whom Christ out of love called 'his race' suffered exile and were persecuted by Hitler. The Jews were the oppressors of Christ and Hitler became their oppressors in the twentieth century. The cycle of history is completed after two thousand years. Such is the nature of guilt and vengeance that it causes a chain reaction which runs through human history.

Not being satisfied with crucifying Christ and feeling envious of the position he and his preachings had, the Jews preached their own doctrines and conjured up a chimera of an unreal world, 'a land of mirrors'. Having done all this, the only thing left for them to do was to outrage humanity itself, to negate and degenerate human nature. That is exactly what is done in history from time to time when frenzied people rise to suppress and torture mankind.

Auden employs the technique of compression successfully in 'Diaspora'. The sense in the poem is somewhat strained due to the compression. The parallelism that Auden draws between the Jews-Christ and the Jews-Hitler themes is ingenious. The economy of style which is the beauty of the poem goes well with the sonnet form chosen for the poem. Also, Auden shows a sensitive understanding of history in recognising the forces at work behind the catastrophic events.

The poem conveys the impression of abstractness since it is bare of imagery. It is also trifle pontifical in tone which is probably due to the religious and the Bibiical theme Auden has chosen for the poem.

9. Mundus Et Infans

'Mundus Et Infans', first published in *Commonweal*, 1942, was included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*. Auden has borrowed the title of the poem from an early sixteenth-century play.

It is also an excellent example of Auden's command over the genre of comic verse and dexterous handling of the language to bring out the effect of incongruity between the immediate subject of the poem and the significantly serious message of the poem.

Auden deals with the birth and behaviour of the child in a seemingly serious vein. The child is born after kicking against the womb of his mother whose 'role' in the 'New Order' is to supply him with food and milk, the 'raw materials'. The child promises to be quiet on the assurance of his food and proper attention.

The child goes off to sleep contentedly but is ready to throw the whole world into commotion at the slightest provocation or disturbance.

Being a pantheist, a believer in the unity of things, and not a solipsist, a believer in the self, the child co-operates with the world, causing only a little noisy scenes which are the expressions of his feelings. He is incapable of perceiving any distinctions between a 'Funny face' or 'Elephant'; he is also incognisant of the narrow considerations of Me and Us.

The child is comparable with a saint who does not lie; he is not ashamed of his act of making a noise. Being occupied solely with the present, the child cannot think and so cannot lie. Grown up boys and girls who have romantic notions are incapable of this innocence.

The child is lovable because his noisy protestations carry no illwill, no 'personal sting'. We should not offer our help to the helpless child considering that we blame Bank, History, or the weather for our faults. We are ashamed to own our shortcomings, but the child 'dares to exist without shame'. His freedom from shame and guilt makes him superior to man and peer of a saint.

Let the child have his own way of praising his 'creator', his mother. And let us rejoice in the prospect that he will not

become pompous and a power-drunk dictator.

He has his liberty to make a racket just as we have ours 'to go upstairs'. We shall never know any distinction between the choices that we make while exercising our liberty. We have never learned to distinguish between 'hunger', the physical love and the selfless love.

The poem owes its charm to the incongruity between the subject and its treatment. The child is treated as an important being, a giant capable of destroying the world at whim. The phenomena of his birth and growth are described in proportions far exceeding the logical norm. To elevate the subject of the poem and create the comic effect, Auden strews the poem with seemingly profound utterances :

> A pantheist not a solipsist, he co-operates
> With universe of large and noisy feelings—states . . . .
>
> Therefore we love him because his judgements are so
> Frankly subjective that his abuse carries no
> Personal sting . . . .
>
> but this beast
> Dares to exist without shame.

Auden disguises the serious message and the content of the poem in the humorous stance he adopts in the poem. He carefully eploys his words and epithets to sustain the element of incongruity which is the mainspring of the humourous delineation of the child-hero of the poem :

> to take on the rest
> of the world at the drop of a hat or the mildest
> Nudge of the impossible . . . .
>
> Still, his loud iniquity is still what only the
> Greatest saints become . . . .
>
> So of course we ought to be glad
> When he bawls the house down . . . .

Through the veneer of such charming and amusing expressions Auden manages to bring home his message that the ultimate hope for man lies in knowing the distinction between the selfish love and the Christian selfless love. And so long as man

does not know it, he is no better than a child. Lack of selfless love breeds cruel tyrants who become a scourage for mankind.

The other important strand of thought in the poem is that man has lost his capacity to exist without shame for his faults. He has lost his courage to own his faults and not to impute them to external agencies and forces.

The poem has an important place in Auden's Canons of Comic verse.

10. In Praise of Limestone

'In Praise of Limestone' was published in *Horizon*, July 1948, and later included in *Nones*. It is one of the best known and most popular poems of Auden, characteristic of his style and technique.

The poem is distinguished by a variety of moods which Auden ingeniously strikes and projects. It is difficult to agree with the critics who seek to make the poem out to be an example purely and strictly of Auden's comic verse and find it an ingenious jumble of incongruities supported by a choice of serious words which conceal the comic element. Undoubtedly the poem has a tone of gentle humour but it is subservient to the other moods which mark the poem.

Auden chooses an idyllic setting for his poem. The limestone-dotted pastoral surroundings become a hallowed land resounding with mysterious voices. The poet invites us to

Mark these rounded slopes
With their surface fragrance of thyme and, beneath,
A secret system of caves and conduits ; hear the springs
That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle. . . .

The scene sketched before us is simple but it takes on an air of mystery and secrecy. There is 'a secret system of caves and conduits' where the springs chuckle as though to tease man into knowing their secret.

It is a romantic setting too, conducive to 'the flirtatious male who lounges/Against a rock in the sunlight'. It is a land about which lovers have always dreamed, where their secrets can be known only by the springs which chuckle.

In such a land are planted the massive human figures carved in the limestone. They stand 'Arm in arm', but not 'in step'. They are engaged 'on the shady side of a square' in a discourse about the moral and ethical nature of their god who cannot be pacified by 'a clever line/or a good lay'. They do not worship a god whose volcanic fury they have to fear. Unlike man, they are perfectly adjusted to the local surroundings and the needs of their world. They know their minds and understand each other even if one of them has to take to evil ways. They are in perfect accord with each other and their surroundings.

Auden's concept of the limestone landscape is his concept of art. The limestone figures have the fixity and volatility of a work of art. The limestone landscape with its figures is an artistic creation conceived in close proximity to Nature. It is art standing in intimate relationship with Nature.

Into this artistic and natural landscape. Auden has introduced certain metaphysical considerations. He talks of a religion free from the fear of vengeance, freedom from guilt and shame and an understanding and possibility of human failure. Auden's idyllic world is suffused with its own norms of good and evil and is very different from the human world bound by an artificial, doctrinaire religion and a rigid code of morality. Auden upholds an honest assertion and expression of the natural instincts and desires of man.

The deceptive, idyllic world of the poem also holds out temptations from which 'Saints-to-be' have to slip away :

> 'Come !' cried the granite wastes,
> 'How evasive is your humour, how accidental
> Your kindest kiss, how permanent is death'.

The clays and gravels cry out to man to deploy armies to drill, to tame the rivers and to construct gigantic monuments. It points to man's wish to impose man-made art on the art of Nature.

The cold voice of the ocean draws the reckless, saying

> 'I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing ;
> That is how I shall set you free. There is no love ;
> There are only the various envies, all of them sad'.

Hope trembles on despair. The poet projects himself into the poem to make a direct assertion :

> They were right, my dear, all those voices were right
> And still are ; this land is not the sweet home it
> looks . . . .

The picture of the modern world that we get is of a

> dilapidated province, connected
> To the big busy world by a tunnel, with a certain
> Seedy appeal . . . .

And when the poet visualises 'a faultless love' or 'the life to come', he can hear only 'the murmer/of underground streams'.

'In Praise of Limestone' is a very good specimen of Auden's casual style and the technique of working variations of moods and feelings around his theme. The argument of the poem rises like a crescendo, gradually reaching its well prepared for climax. We find in the poem a mood of tranquility and mystery effected by an imaginative reflection of art, an argumentativeness and the dramatic tone sustained throughout and a metaphysical speculation on the nature of love and the ultimate state of life.

The poet appears superbly at ease with his subject, introducing modulations into it gradually and expanding the significance of his argument and the landscape. The whole landscape is symbolic and fragile, symbolising the fragility of art and the stuff of which life itself is made.

The images are ideally blended with the theme and the mood of the poem. The style is casual and relaxed. The poem has a lyrical and romantic quality which makes it commendable to the reader with immediacy. It is Auden's magnificent contribution to the corpus of modern poetry.

11. O What is That Sound

'O What Is That Sound' was first published in *New Verse*, December 1934, and later formed a part of the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950.

It is a ballad containing all the traditional elements of the

genre. The situation of the poem is dramatic and the theme timeless. The central figures around whom the drama of the ballad revolves are two lovers, a girl and a boy. The young man is a rebel to whom his political creed is more important than love.

The setting of the poem is a village which is represented merely by a few landmarks—the doctor's, the parson's and the farmer's house. The marching soldiers who look otherwise peaceful move up to the locked room where the lovers are confined and break its lock and door as the rebel-lover flees.

The most important element of the poem is the portrayal and rendering of an emotionally charged situation. The pointed questions asked by the girl rapidly, showing her anxiety are answered briefly and composedly by her lover. Auden presents a situation which is tense, suspenseful and loaded with implications which enlarge its significance beyond the radius of the immediate theme of the poem.

On the surface level the theme is betrayal of love, violence and patriotism. But the other segment of the poem points to a political expediency in the face of which such values as love, and faithfulness are abandoned. The poet seems to hold his moral judgement in abeyance on the lover's act of desertion, as he has attributed a motive to the lover, although the motive is not explained and merely hinted at :

> O where are you going ? Stay with me here !
> Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving ?
> No, I promised to love you, dear,
> But I must be leaving.

The lover is not oblivious of his promises of love, but he feels he has a reason to leave. The lover is placed in a situation where he has to make a choice between his love and the cause which he espouses. So, his betrayal is considered and calculated, based on his beliefs although this view is contrary to that of John Fuller (*Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden*, p. 101).

Another implication which lies beyond the periphery of the immediate theme is the menace of violence present in all ages. Causes might differ from age to age, but the marching, thumping soldiers epitomise the forces of violence and oppression to which peaceful people like the lovers are ever exposed.

Since the building up of the situation in the poem is its main element, its atmosphere and imagery are secondary. The bare outline of the setting is presented and the focus of the poem is on the emotional state of the lovers. The climax is approached rapidly.

The diction of the poem is simple and the anapaestic beat harmonises with the marching of the soldiers and the advance of the climax of the poem. The repetition of the last word in the second line of each stanza underlines the sense of urgency in the central situation of the poem.

12. Lullaby
(Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love)

'Lay Your Sleeping Head, My Love' was later entitled 'Lullaby'. It was first published in *New Writing*, Spring 1937, and later included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950.

It is one of the best known lyrics of Auden. The theme of the poem is love caught at its most intense moment. The situation of love has been so delicately rendered that it becomes an illusion of love. The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue in which the lover addresses himself to his beloved who is lost in 'swoon' after the consummation of their love.

Auden begins the poem at a delicate point when the lovers had just had the fullest realisation of the bliss of their physical and consequently spiritual communion—the oneness of the body and soul. The lover in the poem accepts the limitations of the human character and flesh. And having accepted it, he proceeds to describe his amorous experience with an attitude of tolerance. He acknowledges the fact of human infidelity :

> Lay your sleeping head, my love,
> Human on my faithless arm.

This 'faithless arm' points to the condition of human faithlessness, but this does not affect his love; neither does it detract from the seriousness of the protestation of his love. On the contrary, it intensifies the seriousness of his love.

Auden takes up the kind of love as the theme of the poem, which does not wear away because of faithlessness but because

the highest point of gratification is reached in it. And it is on this that the lover dilates.

The human condition is charcterised by disease, decay and suffering. The beloved, like the lover, may be faithless, but she is 'entirely beautiful' to him.

The second stanza of the poem dwells on the ecstatic experience of the lovers, the physical union leads to spiritual communion. The expression of such an experience is in terms which are suggestive and sensual :

Soul and body have no bounds :
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon.

Next in the stanza, we find a parallelism between the ecstacy of the physical contact and the 'sensual ecstacy' of the hermit meditating 'Among the glaciers and the rocks'. Such a parallelism suggests clearly the essential likeness between the physical and spiritual ecstacy : the sources of both are the same, love for the body and soul and love for the divine and the god-head.

In the third stanza the lover decries the condemnation of infidelity by the 'fashionable madmen' who raise their 'pedantic boring cry' against the union of lovers. The lovers will pay 'every farthing of the cost' when, once their physical union has ended, they will suffer an emotional recoil and deficiency of feelings. All this will happen in future but

from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

It is in the last stanza that the impression of the lover's experience being an illusion or something like an illusion seems to be established. And here the lover seems to utter something which sounds like a prayer, a deep wish coming from the depths of his heart.

When the union of the lovers has expired, they hope to 'Find the mortal world enough'. This line seems to sum up the main idea of the poem. Just as the lovers had accepted the limitations of the human flesh and character and passing of fidelity 'on the stroke of midnight', they may find the world acceptable

in loneliness, anxiety and fear, in "the lost, the lonely and the unhappy". This concern is basically the same as that of profoundly religious people.

"The Double Man", "The Sea and the Mirror" and "The Age of Anxiety" are outstanding works Auden published after his migration to America where his poetry became an exercise in humility and ceased to be self assertive as it was before. Though the long poems have been criticized for being "diffuse in thought and uncertain in technique", yet no serious reader can fail to see in them a new development in style—the emergence of a kind of theological light verse which was Auden's singular achievement as a poet. Besides, they are also important as showing the direction in which Auden was to work. No body would argue that these poems are as great as some of his early poems but no body can ignore them in studying the development of Auden as a poet.

To the charge that Auden's ideologies were merely a series of rationalizations of his own psychological peculiarities, one might answer that though Auden came under various influences during his career—Karl Marx, Freud, Layard, Homer Lane, Groddeck, Blake, D. H. Lawrence and so on, and though his ideas change strikingly, yet it does not mean that he had no ideology which could be called his own. Borrowing ideas from each of the above-mentioned names, Auden formulated his own moral system and even tried tc teach it to others. Sometimes he was concerned with collecting the "symptoms" and sometimes with prescribing the "cures". In the beginning, he contemplated cure through 'Love', then through social revolution and finally through Christianity. Essentially, as Stephen Spender writes, "the direction of Auden's poetry was towards defining the concept of Love. The changes were all in the same direction and once the fundamental commitment to Christianity had been fully made, the only changes were mere shifts of emphasis."

The charges that Auden's constant revisions and alterations prove that he was without any development as a poet is made mainly by critics who have a basically romantic conception of poetry and who, therefore, regard, all revisions and alterations as a 'desecration.' Auden was very careless about polishing his verses, but he was neither irresponsible, nor frivolous and it is not correct to say, as Beach does, that "the success of any

individual poem was a pure accident". Auden had the great gift of a poet and a greater technical competence than most poets of our time, and he has written some great poetry too, which succeeds not by 'pure accident' but because of its intrinsic qualities, as has been shown elsewhere in this study.

To the charge that Auden was not able to maintain the high standard of his early verse, it may be mentioned that no prolific writer has created works of uniform excellence. Besides, Auden's involvement in different things—politics, psychology, religion and so on at different times and sometimes at the same time, created problems for him which he often could not resolve. But there can be no doubt about his technical skill. Even Richard Hoggart concedes that Auden's technical skill, his poetic virtuosity is indisputable. His disposition to play with words, sometimes just for the fun of it, certainly did not become a major poet, but it grew out of his conviction that a poet should not be tied down to artistic decorum. He was of the opinion that a poet belongs to the whole of society and is not, or should not be a solitary person 'hidden in the light of his own thought'. He wished to establish contact with the masses and that is why he tried to remove as many literary hindrances as he could in the way of establishing that contact. He tried popular verse, comic verse and such other forms so that he may be read even by those who do not ordinarily read poetry. Thus, his playing with words and other such things were part of his poetic strategy. He compels us to change our conception of a major poet.

Even while at Oxford, Auden laid the groundwork of his poetics. Stephen Spender reports how Auden told him that a poet must have no opinions, no decided views to put across in his poetry, that the subject of a poem is only a peg on which to hang his poetry, and that a poet must be 'clinical' and dispassionate.

Auden himself followed what he preached to Spender, though some of his ideas, like these that poetry must in no way be concerned with politics, and that modern poetry must not be written in conversational verse patterns, changed later. But he always held to the view that the subject of a poem is not important ; the form is the important thing and a poet must concentrate on form. Auden gave no place to emotion in his

poetry. Even his last few volumes of poems—*City Without Walls* (1969), *Epistle to a Godson* (1972) and *Thank You, Fog* (published posthumously in 1974) are as barren of emotion as his poems of the thirties. He also stuck to his theory of impersonality with the same tenacity. He might have been influenced in these views by Eliot who had declared : "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality." In 1954, Auden said, "Poetry demands that the poet piously submit his precious personality to impersonal limitations, he cannot say anything he likes but only what they permit him to say."

To Auden, a poet was "a kind of chemist who mixed his poems out of words, while remaining detached from his own feelings. Feelings and emotional experiences were only the occasion which precipitated into his mind the idea of a poem".

This point of view is basically anti-romantic and, therefore, to judge his poetry from the romantic standpoint is to do great injustice to his poetry. J. W. Beach made this mistake when he described some of his poems as "earnest, direct and manly expressions of the poet's personal feelings. In fact there is no poem in which it can be said with any degree of certainty that the speaker is Auden himself. He introduced the persona for the expression of intimate feelings, but how can anyone establish that the feelings are Auden's own? As a close friend of Auden put it, "His poetry is often depersonalized in the same way that a philosophic argument or an article in the newspaper exists simply as an argument or as information so that the reader cannot identify himself with the situation out of which the writer is writing, even if he feels that his own situation is stated in it and even if the writer writes in the first person singular."

Unlike the Romantics, Auden was keen to communicate his views to his readers and, if possible, to establish a rapport with them. As early as 1936 he remarked, "Those who have no interest in communication do not become artists either ; they become mystics or mad men." As for himself, he said, "Personally, the kind of poetry I should like to write . . . is the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people." It is another matter if he could not achieve his ideal.

It was during the early thirties when he was under Karl Marx's influence that he came nearest to achieving his ideal. With the increase in the political content of his work, he tried to use the speech of the common people to effectively convey his ideas to them, but he did not remain under Marxist influence for long. Critics often exaggerate Marxist influence on him. Though he felt attracted towards the Marxist analysis of social phenomenon, he never accepted the communist ideology *in toto*. Here the comments of Stephen Spender who was a close friend of Auden, are very revealing : "He had a firmer grasp of Marxist ideology and more capacity to put this into good verse than many writers who were closer to communism. This led to the legend that he went through a Communist phase. But his poem "A Communist to others," is an exercise in entering a point of view not his own. It is his summing up of conversations with Communists rather like the ones I used to have with Chalmers in Berlin."

Though Auden had a strong didactic impulse, he was against the notion of giving too much importance to art as a guide to life. He wrote

> Art is not life and cannot be
> A midwife to society.

and insisted on the separation of art and life. He suggested that art *has* life and hence does not need the help of life. He soon realized that poetry can have only a limited effect on the reader and hence emphasized the importance of parable :

"You cannot tell people what to do. You can only tell them parables and that is what art really is, particularly stories of particular people and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions."

He, therefore, rejected poetry as a magical means for inducing emotions in the poet and the readers and accepted the view that poetry is "a game of knowledge," for this view implies only a limited impact of art on moral choice.

It was, however, around 1948 that Auden wanted the reader to understand emotions and their hidden relationships. But this view also changed later. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1956 he dwelt at length upon

his new conception of the genesis of poetry and its personal function for the poet. He said that the poem instead of making the reader conscious of emotions and their hidden relationship, should pay homage to the existence of sacred beings or events. Towards the end of his life, however, he asked his reader to be aware of his present stage of being and the future being he is in the process of becoming. In asking this Auden was behaving like a prophet for the insistence obviously is on the need for a religious perspective on life.

He also tried to make Love the basis for an ethic : "The course of history," he said, "is predictable in the degree to which all men love themselves and spontaneous in the degree to which each man loves God and through Him his neighbour." and "The only serious possession of men is not their gift but what they all possess equally, independent of fortune namely their will, in other words, their love, and the only serious matter is what they love, themselves or God or their neighbour—in loving well, that is, in loving one's neighbour the pleasure/pain criterion does not apply."

Auden went through various phases but his development was in one direction, and that was the direction of 'Love' as the great 'cure'. Thus, in spite of the apparent contradiction of his different phases, he was, in the words of Anthony Thwaite, "all-of-a piece". In his poetry also there is a fundamental wholeness and consistency. The shifting themes and poetic styles often confuse the reader but in the body of his work one cannot fail to notice similarities of poetic attack and intent that are, in fact, predispositions of his imagination. He is from first to last a moralist. His religious attitude is only a culmination of his earlier belief.

Auden wrote so variously and copiously that he baffled his readers. He was remarkably at ease with his ideas though they changed strikingly during his long life. It has been said that his power of assimilating influences was extraordinary. He assimilated American idiom in an even more living way than he did the English. He enlivened English verse as few poets have done in our century. He was a born craftsman. He tried more traditional genres than most modern poets—ode, sonnet, elegy, eclogue, song, epistle, Oratorio, closet drama etc., and was completely at home in the form that he tried. Form to him

was the most important thing. His manner varied with the genre in which he was working. His diction varies from the conventionally poetic to the technically scientific.

Auden did not want to restrict poetry to its quint essential function, its purest and most intense manifestations as Eliot did. On the contrary, he was opposed to all notions of artistic decorum. Some critics, therefore, called him a very impure poet. But to Auden there was no such thing as a 'pure' poet.

Critics have been hesitant in calling him a modern poet or have called him modern with some reservations. John Blair called him "a second generation modern". But though Auden was old-fashioned or traditional in his views about the role of the poet, in his desire to seek a large audience and to instruct and improve them, he dealt with contemporary ideas and topical events, could turn inward when he wanted and leave his poetry as obscure as any modern poet. He gave expression to the modern sense of loss and anxiety without the "apparatus of polyglot scholarship such as *The Waste Land* presented". Besides, as Spears puts it, he was highly modern in technique. Younger poets of our time found in him a stylistic chameleon and his technical skill an object of curiosity and envy. Professor Beach is right when he calls Auden "a typically modern poet" who "sedulously avoids the 'frontal attack' on his subject, whose thought is characteristically rendered by the 'oblique' or indirect method, the terms of his discourse being, not philosophical abstractions and plain statements of fact, but symbols, myths, and implications, and whose effect are complicated by the use of such rhetorical devices as irony, ambiguity and dramatic impersonation." Prof. Beach concludes : "Like others of his time, he aims at brevity, condensation rather than at diffuseness and elaboration." Auden stands out among modern poets by his earnest effort to be a great modern thinker. He was well-versed in history, philosophy and theology and had a remarkable grip on contemporary currents of thought in political theory, science and psychology. No wonder, he has been such a great influence on younger poets both in England and America. His virtuosity and the versatility of his powers over language will long remain a source of inspiration and, in course of time, may earn him the title of 'the Poet's Poet'.

7

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POEMS

1. Ist September 1939

The poem was first published in *New Republic*, 1939. The title of the poem is the date on which Hitler invaded Poland. Since the poem's occasion is Hitler's attack on Poland and the outbreak of the World War II, Auden puts in it his concerns, fears and hopes. Although the poem was originally written in 9 Stanzas, Auden dropped stanza 8, as he thought that the line 'We must love one another or die' was a lie, something in which he did not believe.

'Ist September 1939' is a poem written in the manner of Yeats's 'Easter 1916'. It has the same posture, fervour and the sense of fear and uncertainty as we find in the famous poem of Yeats. The poem's setting is a bar in the city of New York, where the poet sits reflecting upon the momentous and formidable event of history. Stanza 1 describes the 'waves of anger and fear' which gripped the 'darkened lands of the earth', affecting the private lives of the people and leaving a lurking fear of death at its trail.

In the second stanza Auden casts a searching glance retrospectively on the history of Germany since the times of Luther and concludes that the whole German nation and culture went mad when Luther launched his movement of nationalism. The process of disintegration and violence which started with Luther has reached its gruesome culmination with Hitler. Following the tradition of Freudian psychology, Auden feels that Hitler, the "imago" of Linz, developed into a psychopath due to the unfortunate experiences of his childhood. And Auden effects

a pithy reversal of the Christian principle in the concluding lines of the stanza :

> Those to whom evil is done
> Do evil in return.

The glib talk about democracy has been in the world since the time of Thucydides. The dictators have exploited and twisted the principles of democracy and deceived people by mouthing falsehood and nonsense. Over the centuries in the past people have become deadened to rational thinking and 'enlightenment'. They have accepted the state of affairs and are willing to suffer pain and suffering at the hands of the mis-governing rulers.

The 'blind skyscrapers', the imposing edifice of modern civilisation, proclaim the strength of "collective man"—the society and the establishment. Each country uses its own language to deceive the people about their lot, but it is impossible to be lost in 'an euphoric dream' permanently. In the mirror of the skyscrapers and the achievements of 'collective man', people can see the faces of imperialism and the reflection of wrongs done to mankind everywhere and in all times. Here we find a slant towards Marxist ideas which Auden seemed to have cherished at one time in his career as a poet.

Stanza V recapitulates the image of the bar in which the people cling to their life of quotidian reality. In the flickering lights and the music of the bar people seek shelter from the hazards and cares of the world. They do not want to be awakened to the reality of this illusion. They are like children lost in 'a haunted wood.'

In the VI stanza Auden introduces the main thought of the poem; we might call it the central theme of the poem. It is universal love, the Christian agape versus the individual, selfish love—Eros. The malady of the world seems to be that we want to be loved individually like Hitler and Diaghilev. If people believed in universal love we may not have the catastrophe such as Hitler brought upon the world. But the original error nurtured in the love of every man and woman is that they want 'to be loved alone'.

So the phenomenon of the people indifferently leading their average, uneventful life and the governors playing their game

of fooling them goes on incessantly. Who can help this state of affairs ? Who can 'reach the deaf' and 'speak for the dumb ?'

The poem conculdes on the note of faint hope. Although the world lies defenceless in stupor, few points of light flash from the just people who preach their message to faltering mankind. The poet, although sharing the same weakness of Eros and troubled by the same 'negation' and 'despair', hopes to preach the message of universal love in which the ultimate hope for the survival of mankind lies.

Auden's style in '1st September 1939' is laconic. The diction of the poem is terse and slightly tense which suits the didactic and prophetic stance Auden takes in the poem. The poem leaves an impression of abstraction, of an exercise in metaphysical thinking overlaid with Freudian and Marxian references. It is strikingly bare of imagery—except the two images of a bar and the skyscrapers. For a modern poem taken up with a modern concern of war and the sterility of civilization, the paucity of imagery is rather a deficiency in it.

Also, the poem suffers from ambiguity of attitude which seems to founder on pessimism and hope. It is not clear who the just are on whom Auden pins his hope for the world. His cosmos is sharply divided into the unthinking masses and the croocked rulers and the third category of the just is left unexplained and unaccounted for.

There is also a doubt which is not resolved in the poem. We wonder what Auden means by 'the ethical life' into which 'the dense commuters come'. Since Auden has already presented the masses as being victims of selfish love and devoid of universal love. If the phrase 'ethical life' is used in an ironic sense, it fails to make its mark here.

The final impression that we get is that of toying with ideas which do not form a coherent pattern.

2. In Memory of W. B. Yeats

The poem was first published in *New Republic*' 1939. 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' was written by Auden to mourn the death of W. B. Yeats, the great Irish poet and the contemporary

of Auden, in January 1939. The poem is divided into three sections which form separate poetic units within the poem ; the relationship among these units is not very close and organic, as each section is based on somewhat independent strains of thought.

Although apparently the poem is an elegy, Auden reverses and departs from the known traditions of elegy. He does not idealise Yeats as a poet or sentimentalise his fate. He proceeds to embody certain general reflections on the art of a poet and the place of poetry in the flux of events which constitute human history. So, the death of Yeats remains in the focus of the poem only to support the peripheral reflections in the poem.

Section I of the poem describes, in the dramatic setting, the death of Yeats. It was 'the dead of winter', when 'the brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted.' All instruments agreed that 'the day of his death was a dark cold day'. Significantly, Auden dovetails a series of bleak images at the outset of the poem to underscore the indifference of Nature to the event—the death of Yeats. Such a device establishes the mood of the poem and determines the attitude of the poet. Auden's intention is not to pay encomiums to the great poet.

Ironically—and the irony is grim, indeed—Auden looks upon the death of Yeats the individual as an ordinary occurence. His death did not affect the order of things :

> Far from his illness
> The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,
> The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays . . . .

And here Auden introduces an idea which is central to the theme of the poem :

> Now he is scattered away a hundred cities
> And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections...
> The words of a dead man
> Are modified in the guts of the living.

The poet as an artist becomes independent of his work. He dies physically, but his poetry lives after him. He becomes what his readers make him.

We find a shift in the imagery in stanzas III, IV and V of

Section I. The nature imagery of the first stanza gives way to the imagery of a modern, urban civilization. It takes the poem further from the conventions of pastoral elegy. Now the central image is that of 'a hundred cities', of brokers 'roaring like beasts on the floors of the Bourse'. We are brought to confront the beatings of a modern world and also the sensibilities of Auden as a modern poet. Section I ends with the refrain :

> O all the instruments agree
> The day of his death was a dark cold day.

The cold in nature described in stanza I envelopes the urban scene also.

Section II—the shortest unit in the poem—introduces another strand of thought :

> Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
> For poetry makes nothing happen.

Despite the great poetry of Yeats, Ireland has remained the same. Poetry fails to produce any revolutions or to make changes in society. What lives after a poet is his style ; his manner of saying rather than the subject or the content of his poetry. And this style, manner and language of the poet come to dwell in the subliminal depths of the human psyche, 'where executives would never want to temper' it. The uniqueness of poetry lies in the manner in which it objectifies the human condition :

> it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.

Here Auden's expression becomes charged with psychological overtones. From the description of the mere physical death of Yeats Auden proceeds to examine the psychological implications of the work of a poet and assesses the worth of poetry in terms of modern psychology.

While sections I and II are relaxed in structure, section III is compact and formal. Taking as the spring-board the thought of the preceding section, Auden expands it further in this section. With the death of Yeats 'the Irish vessel' is 'emptied of its poetry'. Time which is indifferent to the faults of character or physical charm 'worships language'. It has for-

given Kipling and Paul Claudel for their views since they wrote well. The language of a poet redeems his views, oddities of character.

The second half of Section III deals with imminence of World War II, the year of Yeat's death being 1939. The mystery and drama of Yeats's death is now set against a world overhung with the clouds of war.

> In the nightmare of the dark
> All the dogs of Europe bark,
> And the living nations wait,
> Each sequestered in its hate...

In such times the duty of a poet is to pursue the hidden truth, to explore the subliminal depths. With the gift of his poetry, of saying things in a powerful manner he can persuade mankind to rejoice even in the face of the curse of war. Only the poet can sing of 'human unsuccess' and cause 'the healing fountain' to start in 'the deserts of the heart'.

W. B. Yeats is only incidentally the subject of the elegy. It embodies some important views of Auden about the destiny of a poet and the value of poetry as art. 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' is a modern poem in its imagery, concept and versification. Auden shows considerable ingenuity in employing blank verse, iambic lines of unequal length, half-rhymes and feminine endings.

3. Canzone

'Canzone' was probably written either in the late thirties or early forties and Auden did not include this poem in the poems first published in the *Collected Shorter Poems, 1950*, as he did not think it worthy of publication.

The poem is an interesting and significant specimen of Auden's experimentation with technique and forms of poetry, although its thought, as we shall see, is at a discount before Auden's technical virtuosity. 'Canzone', considered to be a difficult Latin verse form, has as its main characteristic the repetition of a few end words throughout the length of the

poem. While it may be a difficult thing to achieve as a poetic technique, and may suppress the thought and the other elements of a poem, it has the advantage of sustaining the unity and continuity in the poem. The repetition of end words furthers the units of thought in the poem in a systematic way.

'Canzone' has its central thought in common with that of 'Ist September 1939'. Auden begin the poem with his concern about the tyrannical and destructive forces beseeging the world and the human civilization deviously and in many forms. Man has not been able to make his choice as to what he must love and how he must love, although it 'should be clear as day.' The danger which was a 'mouse' yesterday 'is an enraged rhinoceros to-day' and human values and culture are 'threatened' today far more than ever before. Auden skillfully employs the metaphor of warfare to describe the shadow of the catastrophe closing upon the world :

> Shabby objections to our present day
> Go snooping round its outskirts. . . .

The phrase 'snooping' has its special force in this context to suggest the chill of creeping fear. The poet visualises this danger in many facets :

> Faces, orations, battles, bait our will
> As questionable forms and noises will.

Also, Auden, suggests the dehumanisation of mankind by carefully choosing his epithets :

> Whole phyla of resentments every day
> Give status to the wild men of the world
> Who rule the absent-minded and this world.

'Phyla' and 'wild men' carry a concrete suggestion of the dehumanisation. The world is being ruled by monsters, by people no better than animals while the masses who are ruled are 'absent minded' or ignorant of the bestiality of the forces around them.

The main thought of the second stanza and of the poem as a whole is the need for universal love which is the only form of true love. Man, devoid of universal love, is doomed to suffer in the real world or in 'a majestic world' of his dreams if and

when he can conjure it. His selfish love leads him to the pursuit of unreal and imaginary things—'All homeless objects'. The materialistic approach of man is his undoing :

> Our claim to our own bodies and our world
> Is our catastrophe.

There will be panic and 'caprice' until man realises that his 'dreadful appetite' for material things cannot satisfy him permanently.

The third stanza presents the world in a decayed state of Autumn and corroded by depression. Man's will has become weak as with disease and is caught in futile reflection while the forces of tyranny and violence snarl in the face of mankind and threaten to devour it with 'bacchic fury'. The snarling teeth of tyrants will bring about their own destruction and cannot destroy man's 'will'. Selfish love, such as displayed by despots and oppressors, is the negation of man's very capacity for love, which can cause him 'to shrink to nothing' and to explode and be destroyed. In conclusion Auden says in this stanza that the irony which surrounds the destruction wrought by man is that he knows and remembers the ruin which 'hyaenas cannot know'.

Selfish love causes spiritual darkness—'that spiral staircase' —in which human will flounders for material things, its 'stolen luggage'. Such a pursuit cannot give 'security to any world'. In the mirror of this spiritual darkness the poet can see the 'chaos of the heart' as surely as 'merchants know their coins and cities'. In his heart the poet can feel the impact of true love as against the selfish love and feel how much he has to forget and forgive to come to a fuller realisation of true love which alone can lift the spiritual darkness.

In stanza V the poet feels the impact of true love still more :

> In the depths of myself blind monsters know
> Your presence and are angry. . . .

In the moment of the appearance of true love in the being of the poet, he has a realisation of 'Heaven' and his violent and destructive desires—'The hot rampageous horses'—yield and become subdued. Love is an absolutely chaste force and cannot justify evil in an individual or in 'armies'. We should

be grateful to God that he has given us a conscience to admonish us and prepare us for our trial in life :

> Dear fellow-creature, praise our God of Love
> That we are so admonished, that no day
> Of conscious trial be a wasted day.

The poem ends on a note of warning that if we do not free ourselves from selfish love and learn to practise universal love, we shall make our life ridiculous and our world shambles. Our free will and capacity for true love will be reduced to nonsensical talk, mere gibberish.

In the ultimate analysis, we feel that 'Canzone' is a technical triumph but Auden pays the price for it in terms of obscurity which renders the poem difficult of comprehension. Auden seems to get carried away by his technical innovation and leaves the thought of the poem to develop at the second hand.

The repitition of the end words, particulary of 'will' has an effect of oddness.

4. Musee des Beaux Arts

'Music des Beaux Arts', (the Museum of fine arts) was written by Auden during his winter sojourn in Brussels in 1938. It is one of the most celebrated short poems of Auden.

Auden was inspired by the paintings of Brueghel, the Italian painter of the sixteenth century, which he saw during his stay in the winter of 1938 in Brussels. Although *Icarus* forms the centre of the poem, Auden draws his imagery from the other two paintings of Brueghel also : *The Numbering at Bethlehem* and *The Massacre of the Innocents.* The thought of these two paintings supports the main argument Auden develops in his short lyrical piece.

The poet states at the outset of the poem that the great 'Old Masters' were sensitively responsive to the suffering inherent in the human condition but were also alive to the irony involved in it that whatever be the depth or magnitude of the suffering, the world moves in its daily course of routine in a very callous and indifferent manner. The great painters of the past have caught the moments of intense suffering in their

paintings but have also depicted the ironical and callous indifference underlying such a suffering. And Auden shows a deep critical insight into the art of painting in choosing to make this fact the central argument of his poem. Well might he be called a good critic of painting.

Human suffering, according to the poet, is a strange phenomenon in that it evokes so little sympathy or even empathy in kindred breasts :

how it takes place

while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along . . . .

The imagery of lines 5-7 is drawn from Brueghel's *The Numbering at Bethlehem.* The aged 'reverently' wait for the 'miraculous birth' (the second coming) of Christ since they believe in it whereas there are children (born recently) who do not 'want it to happen' and keep skating joyously 'on a pond at the edge of the wood.'

The contrast in the lines between the aged (and their attitude) and the children with their attitude of indifference is highly and subtly ironical. Normally it is the young who look forward to the future with expectation and the old become pessimistic. Auden reverses the situation to make it ironical. Irony also lies in the fact that childhood, a stage of innocence should be indifferent to the birth of Christ (Baby Christ).

'Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse

Scratches its innocent behind on a tree'—refers to *The Massacre of the Innocents* of Brueghel's. The great 'Old Masters' never forgot that even the greatest and the most dreadful martyrdom, the crucification of Christ, 'must run its course'. Christ died on the cross while his torturer's horse scratched his behind on a tree. Nature is indifferent to the most momentous of human sacrifices and suffering.

The last unit of the poem has Brueghel's *Icarus* at its centre. Icarus, the ambitious Greek youth, tried to reach the Sun with the aid of the wings of wax. He could fly only to some distance, the wings melted in the heat of the Sun and Icarus crashed to the ground and met his end. The tragedy occured

and their love (or the illusion of it ?) may still be sustained through Providence—'involuntary powers'. Eros (physical love) may be converted into Agape. The physical and the mundane may transcend into the divine. Human limitations may be upheld and redeemed by universal and divine love.

The last stanza is an expression of Auden's philosophy of love which is the theme of many of his poems.

13. O Where Are You Going ?

'O Where Are You Going ?' is a ballad which originally constituted the '*Epilogue*' to the *Orators*. In the 'Epilogue' Auden takes up the theme of Quest with blatant optimism, and the ballad is a concentrated and compressed expression of the same theme.

The brave quester who is intent on the exploration of a new world and order of things is questioned by the wavering intellectual, the fearer, and the neurotic and advised to abandon his quest on the basis of the imaginary hazards involved in it.

The 'reader' stands for the escapist, and the sceptical intellectual visualises the birth of the new world as a fatal valley where 'furnaces burn' and the odours of the 'midden will madden'.

The 'fearer', epitomising the cowardly, imagines the dusk delaying on the journey of the quester, making it difficult for him to cross the pass. After all the pains and hazards of the journey the quester may not find his discovery worthwhile.

Next, 'horror' or the fearful neurotic admonishes the quester against the ominous bird, a 'shape in the twisted trees', the figure stalking him and the spot on his skin showing 'a shocking disease'. The quester answers the intellectual, the coward and the neurotic expressing his determination about the quest, putting aside their apprehensions.

The poem is a good example of Auden's technical skill. The tone of the poem is dramatic and the thought has been expressed laconically. The quester who is the hero of the ballad discards the intellectualism, fear and neurosis and adopts optimism to help him complete the Quest.

Auden uses the conventional four-lined ballad stanza in the

poem but in this balanced stanzaic construction he uses alliteration—'reader', 'rider'; 'fatal'; 'furnaces'; 'midden', 'madden'—and alternating feminine and masculine end-rhymes. The central metaphor in the poem is that of the quest.

The imagery of burning furnaces and maddening middens conjures up an outlandish world remote from reality.

14. Miss Gee

'Miss Gee' was first published in *New Writing*, Spring 1937, and was later included in the *Collected Shorter Poems*, 1950. It is a humorous poem written in the traditional ballad form. 'Victor', another ballad by Auden, is a companion piece to 'Miss Gee'.

The central idea of the poem is that repression of the sexual instinct leads to severe physical disorder or ailment, a fact which would not be dismissed altogether by medical opinion.

The central character of the ballad is an overvirtuous, prudish lady who is concerned about showing her modesty externally. She keeps her costume buttoned up to her neck and turns away her face from the loving couples but cannot help having romantic dreams and guilty desires.

She dreamt that a bull with the face of the Vicar of the Church of Saint Aloysius charged on her in a field of corn. The stanza describing the incident is hilarious :

> But a storm blew down the palace,
> She was biking through a field of corn,
> And a bull with the face of the Vicar
> Was charging with lowered horn.

The phallic symbol implied in 'lowered horn' is obvious. The dream of Miss Gee, interpreted in terms of modern psychology, is a manifestation of her desire to be pursued and assaulted. The contrast between her dress, manners and her guilty desires becomes the subject of Auden's mild satire.

As the poem approaches its conclusion, it becomes grim. We are led to sympathise with her for her suffering. The poem is a combination of comic and serious elements. The episode of Dr. Thomas examining Miss Gee and discussing his diagnosis

of the cancer with his wife lends a serious touch to the poem and prepares us for the grim, tragic end of Miss Gee. Auden retains his humour even when finally closing the tragedy of Miss Gee :

They hung her from tne ceiling,
Yes, they hung up Miss Gee ;
And a couple of Oxford Groupers
Carefully dissected her knee.

The character of Miss Gee has been delineated with touches of humour and pathos. Her sloping shoulders, poor bust, low income, cycle with back-pedal brake etc, arouse pity for her.

'Miss Gee' testifies to Auden's skill in evoking different moods and balancing them against each other in the structure of the poem. The total impact of the poem remains marvellously comic.

15. The Shield of Achilles

'The Shield of Achilles' was first published in *Poetry*, October 1952, was later included in the volume of poems entitled, *The Shield of Achilles* and in the *Collected Shorter Poems*.

It is a fine lyrical poem in which Auden puts the classical myth of Achilles and his shield to the service of his art as a modern poet to bring out the contrast between the heroic past and the unheroic present. Auden's handling of the myth is dexterous and highly appropriate in underlying the desolation, cruelty and uninspiring barreness of the contemporary scene.

In order that the parallelism may be effective Auden alternates the reminiscences of the glorious past of the classical world and its legendary beauty with the contemporary scene which cuts into this past and produces an antithetical and negative effect. The contemporary scene is rendered in terms of military operations and senseless violence with implications of religion and art. Thus, Auden's poem is a carefully balanced and well integrated whole in which we find more than one level of meaning. The myth has been worked to a deep significance.

Thetis, the mother of Achilles, the warrior of classical antiquity, looks for the familiar scenes of adventure, art, sea faring

and 'well governed cities' on the shield of Achilles but finds instead a landscape punctuated with the sights of a bare field filled with a multitude of soldiers waiting for the command of their general on the loudspeaker in a dry passionless voice. They followed the command and

> Column by column in a cloud of dust
> They marched away enduring a belief
> Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

Instead of finding the scenes of 'ritual pieties,/white flower-garlanded heifers' (reminiscent of Keats' Grecian Urn), she finds a scene of a concentration camp in an unknown place where

> three pale figures were led forth and bound
> To three posts driven upright in the ground.

It is a travestied reproduction of the crucifixion scene and remarkably conveys the impression of the utter futility of violence in the modern world. The soldiers who are shot tied to the posts suddenly become aware of the hollowness of the ideals they fought for.

Thetis looks for

> athletes at their games,
> Men and women in a dance
> Moving their sweet limbs
> Quick, quick, to music . . . .

but finds 'a weed-choked field' where a 'ragged urchin' loiters about, where girls are raped and violence is committed aimlessly, and where old values and promises are absent.

The concluding stanza of the poem stresses the despair of Thetis and the inevitability of the death of her warrior son. Hephaestos, the 'thin-lipped armourer' who forged such a shield, hobbles away. Auden seems to imply that making a shield like that of the classical myth was unnecessary in view of the inevitable death of man, though he may be as brave and strong as 'Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles' himself. After all even Achilles 'would not live long'.

In 'The Shield of Achilles' Auden employs the technique of applying a classical myth to the presentation of the contemporary scene. The myth serves to enhance the contrast between the

past rich with its values, order and artistic achievements and the present characterised by spiritual and artistic barrenness and aimless violence.

Auden uses stanzas of longer lines with Iambic Pentametre and stanzas of shorter lines which are lyrical and lilting.

The style remains by and large laconic. The imagery employed to depict the richness of the past and the destitution of the present is effective and serves to underline the contrast which is an important impact of the poem. In its technique and concern the poem is typically modern.

The conclusion of the poem resounds with religious implications. The gods themselves seem to share the dismay of Thetis. There is a design and motive in the god creating such a landscape on the shield. There is a suggestion of fatalism, of the doom being spelt providentially, of the inevitable expiry of the old world order and the emergence of the new world order. It also carries the suggestion of history moving in its cycle and completing it. Auden compresses two worlds far apart in time and outlook in the cosmos of his poem.

16. Petition

Auden included 'Petition' in the 1930 volume of *Poems*, but dropped it from the 1950 edition of the *Collected Shorter Poems*. Auden explains the reason for dropping it, saying "I once expressed a desire for "New Styles of Architecture"; but I have never liked modern architecture. I prefer old styles, and one must be honest even about one's prejudices." John Fuller considers this explanation disingeniuous, as its connotation and implication go far beyond the context of the poem.

The importance of this poem lies in the fact that it is a seminal poem and shows the early influences on and the poetic technique of Auden. It is an example of the early experiments of Auden with poetic forms.

As the heavily clinical imagery of the poem brings out, Auden was influenced at this time by the psychological teachings of John Layard who attributed many physical ailments to psychological causes.

'Petition', a Rilkean sonnet, begins in the abrupt Hopkinsian

manner: 'Sir, no man's enemy'. The 'Sir' in the poem, unlike in the Hopkins poem, is vague. It has been taken to refer to God, Satan and the modern psychiatrist.

God, no man's enemy, forgives all except the will of man which negates the divine will. But the poet requests God to be 'prodigal' and forgive even that. The poet further asks for power and light for guidance, 'a sovereign touch' (reminiscent of the healing touch of the sovereign for king's evil) to cure the neural itch', a neurotic disorder, 'exhaustion of weaning' : the psychic strain caused by weaning from mother's milk, 'the liar's quinsy (inflammation of the tonsils), and the 'distortions of the ingrown virginity'; mental disorders caused by the suppression of natural physical desires.

The poet further prays to God to correct and cure the people who are 'cowards' and are suffering from the suppression of feelings; to help those who have not had the courage to satisfy their natural human desires. Those who escape ('retreat') from life should be located ('spotted') under the beams of a search light and brought back into the fold of humanity.

The poet wants healers, particularly psychiatric healers, to be known widely both in cities and country places. The old, decadent civilisation typified by the image of the 'house of the dead, should be destroyed and the new mode and style of life should take its place. People should have a complete change of heart in the new scheme of things.

'Petition' is a slightly puzzling poem in its tone. The reader feels that the poet is poking light fun and writing in a subtly humorous vein. Only the last two lines of the poem ring serious.

The poet dovetails unusual images drawn from modern psychiatry :

> Cover in time with beams those in retreat
> That, spotted, they return though the reverse were great.

We find even some slangs ('spotted') which underscore the non-serious tone of the poem. Auden follows the technique of compression which makes the meaning and sense of the poem strained. The images of 'the house of the dead' and the 'new styles of architecture' are daringly unusual and strike a sudden and different mood in the poem. It is these images which suddenly make the reader conscious that the poet means

to be serious in the poem. But for these images the reader will find it difficult to understand the intention of the poet.

Finally, Auden has successfully used the Rilkean sonnet from which imposes an organic unity even on such an unusual theme of the poem and conveys the impression of the poem being tightly packed with its thought content.

17. Nones

In 'Nones' Auden deals with the Christian theme of the crucifixion of Christ and the guilt of man as its inevitable consequence. Auden has dealt with the Christian themes of the crucifixion, Grace, Original Sin etc., in his poems superbly.

Auden sets his scene of the crucifixion against the pagan mythological background, which lends a touch of the exotic to the highly suggestive and vivid atmosphere of the poem. Christ's birth in Auden's poem is ironically proclaimed by the pagan priests in their trance:

> What we know to be not possible
> Though time after time foretold
> By wild hermits, by Shaman and Sybil
> Gibbering in their trances . . . .

It is revealed cryptically in 'some chance rhyme' and before the world can realise its significance, Christ's birth takes place.

The crucifixion of Christ, scarcely two thousand year old, has already been forgotten, 'the blood/of our sacrifice is already/ Dry on the grass'. The death of Christ has made a void and filled the world with a haunting silence for which mankind is not prepared. The human civilisation, which has a long way to go, does not have anything now to sustain it and enable it to face the final catastrophe:

> We are not prepared
> For silence so sudden and so soon;
> The day is too hot, too bright, too still,
> Too ever, the dead remains too nothing.
> What shall we do till nightfall ?

Auden presents the crisis of the modern world pointedly,

employing phrases and expressions remarkably sharp and pungent : "too hot, too bright, too still, too ever".

In the second stanza of the poem Auden introduces the final scene of the crucifixion which is the central event and round which the main theme of the poem centres. The description of the 'sacrifice' conveys the impression of man's dehumanisation. The crowd gathered to watch the crucifixion is indistinct—'faceless'. It is the kind to crowd which gathers whenever there is an impending calamity, when

any world is to be wrecked,
Blown up, burnt down, cracked open,
Filled, sawn in two, hacked through, torn apart.

Thus Auden piles up the images of violence to reflect on the dehumanised nature of mankind.

After witnessing the crucifixion the crowd has melted away and 'in the shade of walls and trees/Lie sprawled now.' The image of men lying sprawled suggssts a bestial posture. Such a crowd would deny the crucifixion ; it is capable of testifying to the sight only of a 'monster with one red eye'. It is another image carrying the suggestion of dehumanisation. The deed is done and mankind is left with its ineradicable sense of guilt.

The scene of the crucifixion in the second stanza appears to be more like a scene of animal sacrifice than of an important historical event which the crucifixion was. Auden's ambivalence of attitude here is intentional. It is a part of that irony which informs the whole poem and which is a concomitant of Auden's view of the modern civilisation in the poem.

In the third stanza 'the Madonnas with the green woodpecker', 'of the fig tree' and 'beside the yellow dam' turn their faces, as man has lost his creativity : his projects under construction are incomplete and are not expected to be completed. His tools—'Pile driver, concrete mixer, Crane and pick axe'—are lying unused. Man himself is a discarded artefact.

These images also concretely conjure up the industrial and technological world. The images of the Madonna, which are like paintings hung on a wall, are in contrast with the images suggesting the world lying in a jumble of bricks, pick-axe and crane.

The fourth stanza is taken up with the sense of human guilt

which is a result of the crucifixion. Man, striken by the guilt of Christ's death,—'This mutilated flesh'—feels the spell of the asparagus garden, the garden of Gethsemane where Christ was betrayed and seized. The guilt of the momentous event haunts man in every sphere and activity of his life and life cannot be the same for him :

> The aim of our chalk-pit game : stamps,
> Bird's eggs arc not the same : behind the wonder
> Of two-paths and sunken lanes,
> Behind the rapture on the spiritual stair,
> We shall always now be aware
> Of the deed into which they lead. . . .

In the midst of all his games—'racing and tussling and splashing'— man will for ever be listening 'for the cry and stillness to follow after'.

Stanza V—Soon the cool wind will stir the leaves, the shops will open at four, the blue bus will drive off from the pink square and people will distort and miscrep resent and mythify the event of Christ's death. But while they do all this, they would still fail to appreciate and comprehend its meaning. The significance of the Last Supper (suggested by the 'bread' and 'water' in the poem) will be lost for man. The forces of evil will be in operation again :

> And the great quell begin ; Abaddan
> Set up his triple gallows
> At our seven gates, fat Belial make
> Our wives waltz naked. . . .

In stanza VI Auden describes the dream, the nightmare of the human will to escape from the sense of guilt and to evade the responsibility for the deed. Man will try to escape into a nightmarish world to avoid the guilt of and responsibility for the deed :

> Wander instead
> On knife edges, on black and white squares,
> Across moss, baize, velvet, boards,
> Over cracks and hillocks. . . .

The whole stanza is filled with the details of this eerie world

of the nightmare. It is worth noting that the description is also punctuated with some realistic images suggestive of the modern world—telephones ringing and a room lit by a weak bulb.

Stanza VIII—Man, haunted by his guilt, will try to restore order in his world at least on the physical level. Physically things will seem normal in his world. Valves will open and close, glands will secrete, vessels will expand and contract and essential fluids will flow to renew the cells. The animals will watch man in his guilt, awed by his betrayal. Human guilt is here contrasted with the innocence of the animal kingdom. But animals do not remain unaffected by the event. They watch in stillness and frightened, fearing that man may again do something to plague the world for ages. The redemption of mankind lies in the universal love, Agape.

'Nones' is characterised by a variety of imagery in its minute details, a dramatic tone and the touches of subtle irony. The poet invests the theme of the crucifixion with a tremendous historical significance and extends it even to the animal kingdom. Auden shows himself as a master of word-painter in several lines of the poem. His description of the nightmare aided by the cerebral images is superbly effective.

18. Precious Five

'Precious Five' was first published in *Harper's Magazine*, in October 1950 and later in the *Collected Shorter Poems* of Auden. The poem is written in a light vein and is characterised at some places by fine touches of irony. It shows Auden's tongue-in-cheek stance and seems to leave the reader guessing about the serious or otherwise intention of the poet.

The subject of the poem which is somewhat unconventional is exhortation to the five senses. The poet exhorts the five senses individually about their role. Beginning with the nose the poet advises it to be 'patient' and to accept the present despite its disagreeable smell and not to contrast it with the 'grand scent of the past.' It is further advised not to remember 'the calm enchanted wood'—a symbol in the poem of the lost and past childhood. The past with 'its oracle and riddle' (mystery) is changed.

Now the nose is left to serve as a bridge 'from mouth to brow' and 'as asymmetric curve/Thrust outward from a face'. The nose thus thrust into space is conscious of time, remembering the past in relation to the present. Lastly, the nose is advised to point 'up the storm-beaten slope'. We find the subtle irony of Auden in this line : nose which always points down is asked to point up. It should take its course from memory of the past to hope for a better future, although the poet is conscious of the fact that the nose cannot take this "way".

Next the ears are taken up. The ears are advised to be 'modest'. They are the 'spoiled darlings' of this 'undisciplined', 'concert going' modern age in which neurotics delight in pranks. The age with all its abnormalities cannot take 'pure fiction' and instead wants to be fed on 'rumors partly true'. Auden here implies the indictment of his reading public which has lost its capacity for imagining and is reduced to appreciation of pseudo-realism.

The ears must go to school and drudge until they acquire the precision whick makes every sound seems natural. They should become so disciplined that to them nothing is 'fantastic' or 'banal'. What the ears are expected to achieve is the antithesis of the 'undisciplined' age.

The hands are advised to be 'civil'. The human hands, according to the poet, have been the most uncivilised of the sensory organs. They do not know what has been written on them : how they struck their blows motivated by temper or greed long ago. However, the poet wants the hands to retain and revere the memory of the great exploits of theirs of the past when they annihilated ('pulverised') the mythological giants and enforced a severe discipline. The times of such hands are over and such hands are now dead and useless. In the present unheroic and unchivalrous age 'A tight arthritic claw/or aldermanic paw' is regarded as 'impious' and 'obscene'. Waving about such hands in praise was possible in 'homeric days'.

The eyes are exhorted to "look straight" lest in the process of exchanging glances (their 'tete-a-tete') they should lose their 'nakedness', or beauty. While the nose was asked not to compare the past with the present, the eyes are advised by the poet to compare the shameless eye with the ashamed one and

the eyes of now with the eyes of the past, and to dissemble to the heart. They should probe and look outward.

The tongue is exhorted to praise the Earthly Muse in any style that she may choose, for tongues both nimble and slow have found favour by praising the sudden ways of the Earthly Muse. The tongue should also praise the quality of her 'old self', its cacapacity for taste of food and drink, and the animal pleasure of its 'twin', its 'brother below the waist',—the penis. Penis, though savage and unlettered, is capable of animal pleasure and acts as a sensory aid to tongue.

The tongue should praise the Earthly Muse whether its style be fumbling, 'half stutter and half song'.

In the final stanza the poet advises all the senses in general to be happy and enjoy whatever they like : love, alcohol or gold. The poet can find enough reasons to rail at the world in despair or anger for whatever is happening in the present age, but it would be a futile thing to do. For heaven will wait until the poet shouts himself to death and then reiterate its one command : 'Bless what there is for being'. This line seems to sum up the main idea and the exhortation of the poem. We should be thankful and happy for what we have—our life and all that goes with it. There is no need for man to grumble about what was in the past and what is not in the present. His agreeing or disagreeing with scheme of things is of no consequence.

The final stanza lends a touch of seriousness to the poem. The note of optimism which the poet strikes in the end helps the poem to come full circle; it seems up the exhortation to the senses and enforces unity on it. 'Precious Five' is an example of Auden's fondness for unusual and outlandish phrases when he writes even on subjects too common for poetry. Auden develops his subject in an ingenious manner.

19. Paysage Moralise

'Paysage Moralise' (landscape moralised) was first published in *Criterion*, July 1933. Commenting on the poem John Fuller, says " 'Paysage Moralise' is Auden's second published sestina. William Empson had complained that the capacity to conceive

such a large form as the sestina as a unit of sustained feeling had been lost since the age of Sidney," (John Fuller—*A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden*, p. 100).

So, Auden chooses a difficult poetic form for the poem and handles it successfully, retaining the compactness of the structure of the poem and maintaining the continuity and singleness of the theme. 'Paysage Moralise' is written in six stanzas of six lines each and the last stanza has three lines. The six end-words which are repeated in each stanza are : valleys, mountains, water, islands, cities, and sorrow. These six words are the key-words of the poem and also provide the main symbolic framework in the poem. They have been variously interpreted. Spears takes islands to symbolise escape ; cities symbolise society and civilization, water symbolises belief, valleys symbolise innocence, mountains symbolise effort. But John Fuller places different interpretation on the symbolism of these words: "One could say that the *valleys* and *mountains* are the female and male principles (like Lawrence's moon and sun) which govern human behaviour : the *valleys* representing the protection, maternal or erotic, of the womb ; the *mountains* the phallic motif of the Quest. *Water* represents those creations of man which satisfy his sense of purpose, particularly art. *Islands* represent the individual's possibility of escape from society ,which is itself represented by the *cities*). *Sorrow* represents the condition of man, his motivating passion." (Ibid., p. 100).

John Fuller finds fertility symbols in the poem as is evident from his above statement. Whatever be the divergence in critical interpretations of the symbols in the poem, the central meaning of the poem is clear and obvious. Auden mainly talks about the founding of human civilization, man's subsequent dissatisfaction with it, his escape into an imaginary, romantic world, and his failure to realize such a world in terms of reality.

In stanza I Auden describes how human civilization was born. Man settled down in valleys in the hope of a blissful and carefree existence, in those valleys he raised his cities—the emblem of civilization and society. But now man hears of harvests rotting in the valleys; the barren mountains become visible to him and water closes on him in the corners. Human civilization is beset with suffering and sorrow. When we honour

the founders of civilization, we cannot forget the sorrow which has overtaken man in his 'cities'.

The founders brought the desperate people to valleys to settle down there. But soon people started hankering after another world. They started 'dreaming of evening walks through learned cities'. Not satisfied with their own cities, they dreamt of cities which would be more cultured. They gave a free expression to their aspirations for this land of dreams, 'visions of green'.

The founders built their cities by rivers and were comforted by the water running near their windows. But people in their little beds dreamt of islands where the day danced in the valleys and 'the green trees blossomed on the mountains' and where they conceived of love as innocent.

In this stanza Auden suggests that howsoever blissful may be the state of man's existence, it is his nature to yearn for another world, to dream of greener pastures. And herein lies the tragedy of man.

Stanza IV embodies the frustration of the dream that man had of the imaginary world. When dawn came people still found themselves in their cities. No marvellous creature appeared from the water for their delight. They were still conscious of a treasure in the mountains but their own hunger occupied them and became their 'immediate sorrow.' But to some 'moping villagers in valleys' some pilgrims or religious people were still describing blissful island :

> "The gods" they promise, visit us from islands,
> Are stalking, head-up, lovely, through our cities. . . .

They advised the villagers to sail across 'the lime-green water' and to forget their sorrow by meeting the gods.

Lured by the dream-like image of the heavenly-world and hoping to find communion with the gods there, many people were destroyed in the mountains. Many climbed up the crags 'to get a view of islands.' But they could not get rid of the sense of sorrow which stuck to them. Their romantic escape was doomed to failure:

> So many, careless, dived and drowned in water,
> So many, wretched, would not leave their valleys.

In the last stanza Auden emphatically underlines the tragedy of the human condition : 'It is our sorrow'. Man's escape into a romantic world of dreams has been the source of his sorrow. The poem ends on a not of hope : Water would gush forth once again, set the mountains and valleys to become green and man will rebuild his cities firmly grounded in reality and not dream of 'islands'.

'Paysage Moralise' is a romantic poem. It draws its imagery and symbolism from Nature. Its lyrical vein sustains its mood and the theme of man's romantic escape into a world of dreams. The theme has been universalised. Auden does not set the world of his poem in any particular historical period. It encompasses the whole range of human history, from the dawn of civilization to the present times. The issues dealt with in the poem have been endemic in human history.

It is also an example of Auden's skill in handling a difficult poetic form such as the sestina. Auden has the distinction of using an amazing variety of poetic forms, from the most traditional to the most radically rare ones.

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APPENDIX

W. H. AUDEN : THE POET

Model Answers to Questions

UNIVERSITY EXAMINATION

Questions with Answers

Q. 1. Bring out the salient features of Auden's early poetry.

Or

Q. 2. Psychology and Marxism shaped Auden's early poetry. Discuss.

Or

Q. 3. Trace the early influences on Auden's work.

Ans. Auden started writing poetry when he was an undergraduate at Oxford. But even at the early age he had definite views about the scope and function of poetry. He told Stephen Spender, then a fellow-student at Oxford, that Poetry must in no way be concerned with Politics, and that "a poet must be clinical, dispassionate about life".

There is no doubt that the attitude of detachment is the most obvious and important characteristic of Auden's early poetry. At this stage, he is only interested in stating questions. He makes no protest and tries to answer no questions. These things were, according to him, outside the scope of poetry. The subject of a poem, he believed, was "only a peg to hang the poetry on" and farm was the most important thing. Auden made poems out of his observations and literary influences, as if in a laboratory, keeping himself emotionally detached, whether he was writing of cruelty or misery or murder.

But the years during which Auden wrote his early poetry were a period of severe economic depression. The after-effects of the First World War had plunged the entire country in unprecedented gloom. The economic consequences of the War were very widely felt in the nineteen-thirties. Unemployment became rampant and poverty widespread. People were groaning under high prices, oppression and social injustice. The rich were becoming richer and the poor

poorer. There was a feeling of dejection and frustration all-around. As Auden himself put it in an early poem, it was a time of "smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals." He described it a time of "crisis and dismay." Auden who was trying to make his mark as a poet at this time, naturally became interested in the condition of the people and the problems with which they were confronted. He found the situation a helpless one but did not become desperate. He started looking for new directions. Some young writers at this time were becoming keenly interested in Marxism which was a new movement at this time and which seemed a panacea for all the current social evils. These writers became converted to the view that there could be no justification for the theory of art for art's sake at a time when people were groaning under poverty and social injustice. Art, therefore, they insisted must be geard to the needs of the times. This, they argued, had been done in Russia and Germany where writers, inspired by Marxism, had used literature for the reform of society and the upliftment of the downtrodden. Most of the writers of the thirties including Spender, Day Lewis and Mac Neice had come under Marxist influence. Auden also saw a ray of hope in this ideology. Convinced that the post-war civilization was disintegrating he thought it his moral duty to protect it, and so decided to employ his art in the service of society. Soon he became a champion of social justice and began to emphasize the need for a revolution to bring about a change in society.

However, the influence of Marxism on his early poetry should not be over-emphasized, for Auden never became a Marxist as such nor did he pass through a Marxist phase. Marxism was only one of the many influences on Auden's poetry. It attracted Auden because of its conception of human nature and its deep concern for improving the lot of man, and not as a political system. Its diagnosis of social ills and its call for action seemed particularly valuable to Auden.

In his approach to the problems of his time Auden was also influenced by psychologists like Freud, Groddeck and Homer Lane. Even while at Oxford Auden had become specially interested in psychology and acquired an extensive knowledge of modern psychology. The thirties were a time when the knowlede of psychology was specially helpful. Auden learnt from Homer Lane the need and value of the 'change of heart' for the betterment of the masses. From Groddeck and Freud he learnt to communicate unusual imaginative excitement which led him to myth-making. The lonely and the unhappy bothered him most and he endeavoured to bring them solace and comfort through his understanding of human psychology. Thus Auden's early poetry was inspired by human considerations and his themes became society, its many evils and the probable solutions to those evils. He felt impelled to use his poetic talent for a sacred cause—the amelioration of the economic, social and political condition of his country and therefore, he started writing poetry with the specific purpose of contributing his mite for the betterment of his country and countrymen.

In his early poetry Auden emphasized the need for establishing a new order which he felt could be brought about only by change of heart. If man does not want to die, Auden said, man must change himself and his surroundings. He thus created in his readers an awareness of his unfortunate situation and a realization of the need for conquering those forces within himself which prevent him from bringing about the necessary change in himself and his surroundings.

This change of heart, Auden insisted, could be brought about only by Love. For Love alone can help people get over their bitterness and hatred for those who were responsible for the present state of affairs. Love alone could show people the way to unity and brotherhood which were necessary to usher in the new social order. Man could make this world a happy and comfortable place if he could love his neighbour and spread the message of love around himself.

But Auden's concept of Love keeps on changing in his poems. In Poem X of *Poems 1930* he accepts that it is difficult to define Love. But he points out that it is not merely physical, for physical Love is short-lived and becomes 'faithless' after sometime. Love, Auden explains, cannot exist in people with split personality or people who have a strong death-wish. Love exists where vitality exists. Hence Auden identifies it with Freudian Eros which is the creative force in human beings and which is possible only in a person who has full freedom to follow his instincts. An integrated and properly developed personality only makes one capable of loving— Sense of guilt and ailments wreck the personality and thus deny it the power to love. In Poem XXV of *Poems 1930* Auden suggests that love is the main source of a properly developed personality, but it ends with the question if it is possible for anyone to recover love.

In most people, says Auden, Love ends up only by becoming a search for happiness or a gratification of the senses. In the early poems Auden describes the misery and the sorrow of the people who are engaged merely in self-gratification and in whom the great healing power of Love does not exist. Self-Love, he suggests, is the worst kind of love as it makes the individual self-centred and conceited. In *The Orators* Auden dwells upon the various kinds of self-regarding love which have brought ruin and misery to human beings and their country. According to Auden, there are three kinds of lovers : (1) excessive lovers of themselves and their neighbours, (2) defective lovers of God, and (3) perverted lovers. He believes that such lovers cause social and moral degeneration in the society in which they exist.

Self-love is the theme of most of the poems of the 1930s. The speakers in these poems suffer from sickness of all sorts. They suppress their natural instincts and healthy feelings as they are victims of self-love. The past was good and healthy, the present is sickly and morbid. In Poem XXIX of *Poems 1930* men having turned sick seek neurotic escape in idealism. Auden believes that suppressed desires lead to various kinds of ailments. In "Miss Gee" and

"Victor" Auden's theme is how ignoring of natural instinct and suppressing of desires leads to fatal diseases. This psychosomatic theory of diseases Auden had learnt from Homer Lane and other psychologists.

In the last poem of *Poems 1930* later called "Petition" the poet, addressing "the Deity" (the Supreme Healer or Homer Lane) says that everything can be forgiven except "negative inversion" of the will. The poem is not a conventional petition but the word is used in a psychological sense as "the sovereign touch" is requested to cure not scrofula but "the intolerable neural itch" further particularized as "The exhaustion of weaning the liar's quinsy/And the distortions of ingrown virginity". Those in retreat from life are to be caught as in a searchlight's beam and made to come back :

> Cover in time with-beams those in retreat
> That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great and
> human healers are to be publicized.

Further, as Prof. Spears-points out, although the terms of the prayer appear to be exclusively psychological, political implications are also present. The first petition is for "power and light," which suggests electricity as well as spiritual qualities, and at the end the harrowing of hell is fused with the image of the old civilization as a "house of the dead" and new physical modes of life are given importance equal to that of the crucial change:

> Harrow house of the dead ; look shining at
> New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

Thus Auden's concerns in his early poetry not only include social, economic and political condition of the society but also the need for spiritual progress and change of heart.

It has sometimes been pointed out that Auden's philosophy of the stage was not coherent ; that it was patched up from three main influences—Freud, Marx and 'Love'. Though it was true that there was some incoherence in his philosophy in the beginning, yet there was no basic contradiction in his views. He was largely in agreement with the Marxist social analysis ; he was also impressed by Freud's analysis of the psyche and he talked of Love even though he was not a Christian at this stage. Actually, in all these things he was tackling the problem of the moral will and his answer was electric.

Q. 4. Do you agree with the view that Auden is essentially an anti-Romantic poet ?

Or

Q. 5. "Many of his poetic practices are most easily conceived as reactions against Romanticism." Is this a correct evaluation of Auden's poetry ?

Or

Q. 6. Modern critics argue that all modern poetry including Auden's is essentially Romantic. Do you agree with this view ? If not, give arguments to substantiate your viewpoint.

Ans. Auden's early poetry had some traces of Romanticism but he cannot be described as a Romantic poet. As he grew into a mature poet he discarded whatever influence of Romanticism was there in his poetry and thus became an anti-Romantic poet. However, the fact remains that in his earliest poems he showed a lot of interest in nature and romantic feelings of love. This was but natural as in his early years he had come under the influence of romantic poets including Wordsworth. As Christopher Isherwood writes in his essay on Auden's early poetry :

"The scenery of Auden's early poetry is almost invariably mountainous. As a boy he visited Westmorland, the Peak District of Derbyshire and Wales. For urban scenery, he preferred the industrial Midlands; particularly in districts where industry is decaying. His romantic travel-wish was always towards the North. He could never understand how anybody could long for the sun, the blue sky, the palm trees of the South. His favourable weather was autumnal; high wind and driving rain. He loved industrial ruins, a disused factory or an abandoned mill: a ruined abbey would leave him quite cold. He has always had a special feeling for caves and mines."

Besides in his early poetry we find a nostalgia for childhood, yearning for a trust in the unconscious and the flesh, and a considerable measure of trust in the perfectibility of man.

Auden had a peculiar fascination for the English landscape. "If we had space to suggest" writes Richard Hoggart, "only picture of Auden, and if this picture had to be as nearly as possible representative we would show a landscape and a wanderer, a man on a Quest. The figure of the wonderer, the isolated man on a search, appears more frequently than any other in Auden's poetry." *The Orators*, too, has a romantic tinge. It is about romantic male solidarity in general ; more particularly it is about the fantasies of power and the daydreams of violent social change which this solidarity can evoke, in periods of decay among gifted and discontented young men.

Joseph Warren Beach made him out to be a Romantic poet when he described some of Auden's poems as "earnest, direct and manly expressions of the poet's personal feelings." But this is not a correct evaluation of Auden's poems. In fact there is no poem in which it can be said with any degree of certainty that the speaker is Auden himself. Auden introduced the persona for the expression of intimate feelings but how can anyone establish that the feelings are Auden's own ? As a close friend of Auden put it, "His poetry is often/depersonalized in the same way that a philosophic argument or an article in the newspaper exist simply as an argument or as information so that the reader cannot identify himself with the situa-

tion out of which the writer is writing, even if he feels that his own situation is stated in it and even if the writer writes in the first person singular."

Unlike the Romantics Auden was keen to communicate his views to his readers, and, if possible, to establish a rapport with them. As early as 1936 he remarked, "Those who have no interest in communication do not become artists either ; they become mystics or madmen." As for himself, he said, "Personally, the kind of poetry I should like to write ......is the thoughts of a wise man in the speech of the common people."

Besides, Auden had a strong didactic impulse. He was against the Romantic notion of giving too much importance to art as a guide to life. He wrote

> Art is not life and cannot be
> A midwife to society.

and insisted on the separation of art and life. He suggested that art has life and hence does not need the help of life. He soon realized that poetry can have only a limited effect on the reader and hence, emphasized the importance of parables :

"You cannot tell people what to do. You can only tell them parables ; and that is what art really is, particularly stories of particular people and experiences, from which each according to his immediate and peculiar needs may draw his own conclusions."

Auden rejected poetry as a magical means of inducing emotions in the poet and the readers and accepted the view that poetry is a "game of knowledge." This view implies only a limited impact of art on moral choice. Instead of leaving the reader free to make any use of the poem he may desire, Auden wanted him to become conscious of "emotions and their hidden relationships."

Towards the end of his long career Auden began to insist that every reader must examine himself. He asked his reader to be aware of his present state of being and the future being he is in the process of becoming Auden was convinced that the faces of being and becoming are essential terms of human existence that every man needs to be conscious of what he is willing to become. The parable maker is successful in his mission if he is able to make his readers "unforgetably conscious."

In order to substantiate the view that Auden was an anti-Romantic poet, however, one will have to examine his poetic theory and practice during his long career as a poet. The earliest record that we have of Auden's views on poetry is that provided by Auden's close friend Stephen Spender in his autobiography *World Within the World*. Spender tells us that Auden had very strong and firm views about the function of poetry even while he was at Oxford. He recalls that Auden told him that a poet must have no opinion, no decided views which he seeks to put across in his poetry. Further, a poet

must be clinical, dispassionate about life. A poet feels much less strongly about things than do other people. Moreover, the subject of a poem was only a peg on which to hang the poetry. Auden compared a poet to a chemist who mixed his poems out of words, whilst remaining detached from his own feelings. Feelings and emotional experiences were only the occasion which precipitated into his mind the idea of a poem. Thus the poet's task was always impersonal according to Auden. This is enough to make him an anti-Romantic poet.

But Auden went further. He looked for an audience, particularly during the later half of the 1930s when he came under Marxist influence. He wanted to reach an unsophisticated "proletarian" audience, but the audience he could reach in the late thirties was the educated middle class with left wing or revolutionary sympathies. He wanted his audience to understand his views. Hence he wrote a kind of poetry in which he could invite his audience to share his vision.

Auden also gave due consideration to Eliot's view that modern poetry must be difficult. From 1926 to 1935, Auden consciously introduced obscurity in his poetry in order to look modern. He tried to create obscurity sometimes by a skilful manipulation of language, especially syntax and diction, and sometimes by addressing himself to a small sophisticated audience. This anti-Romantic expression became most obvious in his early poems when his themes and attitudes are rather romantic.

Though it is true that Auden was influenced by Burns, Byron and Blake, and he tried to imitate their satiric light verse, yet the poems that he imitated were mostly their serious poems. Soon, however, these early influences were offset by the more powerful influence of T. S. Eliot who finally shaped Auden's view on poetry.

But some critics are of the opinion that modern poetry including that of Eliot's is a hangover of Romanticism.. Critics like John Bayley and G. S. Fraser argue that modern poetry is essentially Romantic. This argument can best be answered in the words of Monroe K. Spears :

"I will . . .briefly indicate two pragmatic objections. In the first place, the typical modern poets—Pound, Eliot, Auden have not thought of themselves as Romantics; they thought they were revolting against late Romanticism, and to argue that they were self-deceived tends to discredit them. Further, no matter how innocuously "Romantic" is defined, the popular connotation of ineffective dreaminess retreat from reality into wishful thinking linger on, and the argument therefore tends to suggest that modern poetry has these faults. Secondly, the argument lacks operational validity: if it suggests to people that Eliot, Pound, Auden can be read in the same way as Shelley and Keats, it misleads them seriously. (There is, of course, a genuine resemblance between some of Auden's verse and some o

Byron's but these are precisely those aspects of Byron that are not typical y romantic)."

Modern poetry actually began as a reaction against Romanticism and Auden was aware of what the modern poets were doing in poetry. He also deliberately and consciously wrote poetry wh ch could be called modern. However, to say that Auden's poetry in anti-romantic is not to say that his poetry is classical. Classical poetry derives from a longer classical tradition. Anti-Romantic only indicates a reaction against Romanticism. As T. S. Eliot makes it clear in his essay "Tradition and the individual Talent' he wanted to undo the emphasis on uniqueness, subjectivity and the orig nal laid by the Romantics, Eliot's poetry consequently became anti-Romantic. Auden was most influenced by Eliot's views and so he also belongs to the anti-Romantic group of poets. His early poems may show attitudes traditionally associated with Romanticism, but as his poetic powers matured he assumed a didactic tone. As Blair puts it, "Since about 1935, most of Auden's developments in manner and technique grow out of his search for more effective, though always indirect didactic means. His philosophical position has changed over the years but the root problem of writing a poem in his mode has not. In every poem he seeks a poetic strategy which can surprise, shock or reduce his reader into serious self-examination, but simultaneously he seeks to avoid prejudging the terms in which the self-assessment should take place. . . .The technique which makes didactic effectiveness possible may be just that instrument which defeats itself. Wrestling with this paradoxical aesthetic moral problem has been Auden's major concern as a mature writer and an important stimulus to his inventiveness. The basic stances he has developed to deal with the problem constitute his poetic mode. In general orientation and method, the resulting poetry is clearly "modern". His poems are characteristically ironic and indirect, impersonal and largely "anti-poetic".

To Auden shapes and volumes were important in poetry. Colours and smells he condemned as romantic. Form alone was of significance to him. This conception of poetry is clearly anti-Romantic.

Q. 7. "Auden is a satirist with a difference." Discuss.

Or

Q. 8. "Auden has often relied on the devices of satire to jolt his audience into a real consideration of themselves and their world." Do you agree ?

Or

Q. 9. Is it correct to describe Auden "the satirist as lunatic clergyman" ? Elaborate and comment.

Ans. Auden has written some very fine lyrics yet he is not

classified among Lyrics Poets. He is known primarily as a satirist as his poetic powers are more like Dryden's and Pope's than like Eliot's or Yeats's.

Satire, however, is not considered a pure form of poetry as it is always didactic and usually deals with current issues which are bound to become dated. The satirist has an ulterior motive; he writes with a view to changing or reforming people or society. His purpose is to unmask man and to show him in his true colours. Thus satire is closely allied to Realism. People are shown with all their weaknesses and defects so that they might try to reform themselves and become better persons.

Auden considered satire as one of the main functions of poetry. He wrote : "Art is not magic i.e. a means by which the artist communicates or arouses his feelings in others but a mirror in which they may become conscious of what their feelings really are. . . . Its proper effect, in fact, is disenchanting." Auden's treatment of art as mirror took him to psycho-analysis. The poet by holding the Mirror before people compels them to recall repressed or suppressed emotions and feelings which become the cause of psychic disorders or even physical ailments. People are thus in a better position to face reality. Stephen Spender who was deeply influenced by Auden's views on poetry writes : "Poetry recognizes the sicknsss of society and of its compon^nt individuals and its causes ; it performs a therapeutics function analogous to the psycho-analysis."

A satirist in the modern times is faced with the problem of lack of emotions and attitudes. Satire demands light verse or popular verse for its expression. Auden had a remarkable mastery over this genre. But a poet can succeed in his mission only when his interests and perceptions are similar to those of his audience. Light Verse generally becomes conventional. The poet accepts the values and attitudes of the society. But he can best see his society from a distance. If he becomes involved in it he cannot see it dispassionately. Distance, however, creates the difficulty of communication. Auden expresses the problem in *Letters from Iceland* :

Art, if it doesn't start there, at least ends,
Whether aesthetic like the thought or not,
In an attempt to entertain our friends,
And our first problem is to realize what
Peculiar friends the modern artist's got.

Even in his earliest poems when he had no commitment—social or political, Auden's pictures of society are satirical. He is a detached observer of life around him and has what he called a clinical attitude. He is not one of the people he describes, he is looking at society from a distance and is exposing it with a view to shocking and reforming.

After his visit to Berlin in 1928 Auden's political interests

became clear. He came under the influence of Karl Marx and his pictures of society became increasingly satirical. His study of John Layard and Homer Lane also led him to believe that all physical ailments have a psychological cause. Auden's tone became increasingly satirical. In one of his early poems "Consider this and in our time" he makes a direct and caustic attack on the reader as one of Death's admirers :

> Seakers after happiness, all who follow
> The convolutions of your simple wish,
> It is later than you think ;

The poet's intention is to deliberately hurt the reader into arousing him to some kind of action.

Auden's favourite mode of satire is giving us satiric portraits. This is also the traditional mode but Auden presents them with a difference. Whereas the classical portraits represented both the society and the individual, Auden's portraits are very individual. He does not have actual persons in mind and this is the secret of his success for when he has any he is not so successful.

When Auden came under Marxist influence, the capitalists became the target of attack as the following lines testify :

> Beethameer, Beethameer, bully of Britain,
> With your face as fat as a farmer's bum. . . .
> Are you sure you're our saviour? We're certain you smell. . . .

But Auden did not spare the middle class either. In "On this Island", identifying himself with the bourgeoisie, he presents generalized self-portraits

> What was god-like in this generation,
> Was never to be born.

In this poem he attributes the present state of affairs to absence of disciplined love:

> The disciplined love which alone could have employed those engines
> Seemed far too difficult and dull,
> And when hatred promised,
> An immediate dividend, all of us hated.

Later, Auden began to attack the attitude of complacency which makes people inactive and irresponsible. His call was for action and therefore, he openly attacked people with no programme of action. He also criticized people for their timidity and too much caution in discharging their duties.

In "The Unknown Citizen" Auden portrays the ideal citizen of a bureaucratic state :

> He was found by the Bureau of statistics to be
> One against whom there was no official complaint,
> . . . .Our researchers into public opinion are content
> That he held the proper opinion for the time of the year ;
> When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war,
> he went.

But the state does not bother itself with the question whether an individual is free, happy or if his personality is developing fully

> Was he free ? Was he happy ? The question is absurd,
> Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard

In "The Managers" Auden castigates the present day rulers. He says that our rulers are overworked bureaucrates but they are not as dedicated to their work as they claim. They are motivated by Eros and so we need not pity them.

Auden was well-versed in the art of mimicry and parody which are necessary for the technique. Auden also had the dramatic sense which heightens the force of ironic arguments. He can write almost as powerfully as Swift using almost the same technique of advocating the cause which is to be ridiculed. Assuming a dramatic personality, Auden becomes a powerful champion of the position he wants to make fun of. In this way he compels decent complacent people to do some rethinking about their thoughts and actions. Auden does not hurt the victim but he offers his explication as in *The Orators.* "Letter to a Wound" is a love-letter of a bourgeois intellectual who is in love with his wound and is even prepared to die for it. This reminds one of the psychosomatic theory of diseases which Auden advocated. Similarly "Address for a Prize-Day" is a very interesting parody. Isherwood tells us that Auden is here imitating the manner of a school headmaster. He is here actually analyzing the sick state of his country. He ascribes the sickness to a failure on the part of its people to love.

In "The Letter to Lord Byron" Auden introduces lightness by adopting the persona of the poet Byron. By assuming this mask he goes on to comment upon the condition of modern life and literature. He makes a dig at the pseudo-intellectuals of our time who cheat people by telling them all kinds of lies and by inventing all sort of catchy phrases.

In his longer poems also Byron employs his satirical devices. He believed that it is not possible for a modern poet to write long serious poems. Hence he tried mock-epics and succeeded remarkably in this genre. In writing in this mode he found himself completely at ease.

Q. 10. Describe Auden's concept of Love.

Or

Q. 11. "Can Love be said to be a major theme in Auden's poetry ?" Discuss.

Or

Q. 12. "Learning Love and unlearning hatred is proposed as a remedy in almost every poem." Elucidate.

Or

Q. 13. "Love is in him one of the most elusive of terms whose aspect and meaning changes as fast as Protens changed when seized by a Menelaus in hopes of getting him to prophecy." Do you agree with this view ?

Ans. It is not easy to define exactly what Auden meant by ' 'Love" for he remains not only vague in his use of this word but its meaning is continuously modified. There is often a generalized air, a luminous air about his use of the word, a suggestion of the transcendental which inspires a lyricism otherwise expressed only in his poems of personal affection :

"O Love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven
Make simpler daily the beating of man's heart.

The basic idea is that men do wish to live together and Love is a binding force. To Auden Love is more than either sexual or personal relations, though it includes these senses. It looks towards the larger community but it does not suggest that the individual should be submerged in the group. It has something in common with Bergson's Theory of creative evolution and Shaw's notion of the 'life-force'. Most of Auden's healers have contributed something to the general idea ; it owes something to Groddeck and something to Klages. There is a close resemblance to Freud's "erotic instinct" although Auden's 'Love' is much vaguer at the edges. It is in one aspect a form of mental therapy, a gloriously effective psychoanalysis, a liberator, a cleanser, a releasing and enlarging power :

The word is Love. . . .
Surely one fearless kiss would cure
The million fevers.

It is partly Blake's 'energy' (in the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell", for example) it owes something to Lawrence and a lot to Homer Lane who made Love central to his psychology. According to Lane 'Love' is in all men but it finds itself only in community. It is partly a biological urge towards cooperation. An object is doing good when it is fulfilling its function in society, that is to say, when it is living creatively, that is to say, loving.

'Love is the source of all that is lucid and civilized in human society ; it encourages a 'natural climate', 'the birth of a natural order'.

And since 'Love' is a creative force it cannot remain hidden. Hence, if it is denied a normal growth, it may take a horrible shape. So many psychological oddnesses are at bottom the false attitudes of 'Love', for example, the excessive love of self, the transformation of the need for love into an insane striving for worldly recognition and Groddeckian Sickness :

"Love, that notable forked one......transforms itself to influenza and guilty rashes."

In each of these cases love was actually self love since 'Love' can flourish only in the field of relationships, the greatest obstacle to its growth is self regard. Not until the age is forgotten in love can there be an escape from the prison cell.

"No personal experience, no scientific knowledge gives any other verdict than that what you can self forgetfully love, you can cure."

Thus by the operation of love, the will may be cleansed, and the personality, freed from undue preoccupation with itself, be rendered less likely to breed strange obsessions—yet the self need not lose its identity or importance by being merged into a larger unit, the new relationship includes and transcends the old :

"Every eye must weep alone
Till I will be overthrown

. . . .

Then all I's can meet and grow,
I Am become I Love,
I Have Not I Am Loved
Then all I's can meet and grow.

The same theme is the core of the Airman's message in The Orators : "Of kindness to one another for likeness, of love for each one's uniqueness", the Airman calls it there the message of "the central awareness", but it stems from the Christian tradition.

The important, the cardinal point about 'Love' is that it is one thing needful, that it is there, that it needs only to be sought with care, and when found, nourished and developed :

O can you see precisely in our gaucheness
The neighbour's strongest wish to serve and love

And at the prospect of building the city where "the will of Love is done and where "grace may grow outward/and be given praise/ Beauty and virtue be vivid there", the lyricism rises again, very strong but still conditioned :

". . . .Love finally is great,
Greater than all : but large the hate,
Far larger than man can ever estimate.

It is conditioned because Auden has not upto this point fully faced that 'large hate', nor did he face it until the late thirties, although he knew all alone that a conception of love which did not include and transcend sin was inadequate. He was aware of the fact that 'Love' has its stern duties and necessities : "We know it", he says "we know that love needs more than the admiring excitement of union." He felt that Homer Lane had oversimplified the issue. In his twenties Auden found it impossible to accept the Christian answer ; he was too much the child of the destructive half century for that. He tried instead to stiffen the vague concept "Love" by uniting it to position action, to a scientific and a social discipline. He had to have such a concept because Freud and Marx taken together did not give a complete answer. 'Love' gave some sort of harmony to the separate and incomplete themes of Freud and Marx; it did a good deal more than that. It stood in its own right, it suggested themes profounder than any Freud or Marx had concerned. Auden continued to talk of love insistently "the course of history is predictable in the degree to which all men love themselves and spontaneous in the degree to which each man love God and through him his neighbour", he said.

To find just what 'Love' means has been Auden's chief endeavour in the four long works he wrote in America. To him pure love is selfless and disciplined. It is free from hatred and other base passions like jealousy, wickedness etc. It is guided by a spirit of service and sacrifice. It rises above the interests of an individual to include love for neighbours, the society and the community at large. Individual interests, Auden felt strongly, must be sacrificed for the larger interests of the country. Auden became more and more interested in the public cause. He now started condemning selfish love not because of his belief in the freedom of the unconscious as he did earlier, but because he wanted to cnange the environment for which Love has to take the help of reason and discipline. He was very unhappy at people's taking recourse to hatred when hatred seemed to pay an immediate dividend." He told people to conquer hatred to be able to love and live. In his well-known poem, "September 1, 1939" he wrote.

"We must love one another or die."

The limitations and dangers of selfish love from the theme of several poems. He explained that lovers born and lived in an atmosphere of hatred and ill-will do not have true or pure love to offer each other. This Auden's concept of love gradually became humanistic. He began to realize that human life is bound to have its limitation as a human being cannot be perfect. Thus his ideal of love became human as Love became a way of living. Though man's

Love is bound to be imperfect yet it is the only thing which can redeem us from our guilt and anxiety and become the source of human satisfaction. It is the only cure man can find and hence it is to be welcomed in spite of all its limitations. Man must make a complete surrender to 'Love' to attain his ultimate objective—redemption from sin and anxiety.

The acceptance of Love with all its limitations and imperfections paves the way for the acceptance of religious faith. Man's awareness of his guilt and his wish to go to Eden can be reconciled only by accepting 'Love' as "Agape". "Agape", as Christianity defines it, is universal, divine and selfless love. Auden's earlier preoccupation with perversion and guilt resulting from repression and supression of natural desires and unhealthy environment is now connected with the idea of the original sin which transforms the personal and social love into selfless and universal love. Love therefore becomes all-embracing and transcends all limitations but recognition of man's simple nature is the first step in that direction, for it is only by accepting his simple nature before God that man can free himself from guilt. But this is possible only with the help of "Agape" which can free man from his nature. It is through "Agape" that Eros and Logos (Divine Love) are united. "Agape" requires, Auden wrote that "we love our enemies, do good to those that hate us and forgive those who injure us, and this command is unconditional. "Agape" therefore, is the highest and the noblest kind of love which not only endears us to fellow human beings but also purifies our souls.

Since "Agape" is the Christian concept of Love, Auden feels irresistibly drawn towards Christianity which now seemed to him the only way out of our present suffering. Having accepted Christianity, he emphasized the need for universal love in his "New Year Letter", the first long poem of his religious phase. In his next long poem "For the Time Being" he asserted that one can find love only by surrendering one's will before the divine Will. Thus the reconciliation of the individual Will with the Divine Will is absolutely necessary. This is God's message to man. He sent Christ to the earth to convey this message to human beings. Though Auden continued to explore the meaning of 'Love', his concept of Love as a Healer did not change. In fact, with the acceptance of Christianity and the original idea of sin he arrived at the end of the road and in the poems of the late fifties and sixties. Love as an idea or theme ceased to be his major concern.

Q. 14. Why is Auden described as the most representative poet of the nineteen-thirties ?

Or

Q. 15. "It is said that the poetry of Auden and his group appealed to the people of their generation because it sprang form a common feeling of guilt and responsibility." Discuss.

Or

Q. 16. "Auden has tried to resolve the central problem raised by war as the prime example of man's infattible nature." Discuss.

Or

Q. 17. Is it correct to say that Auden's verse related to the political. social and intellectual climate of the 1930s ? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. W.H. Auden wrote at a time when his country was passing through an unprecedented social and political crisis. His first volume of poems appeared in 1930. The thirties were a period of great economic depression both in England and America. Auden himself described it as a period of "crisis and dismay". Unemployment and poverty had spread misery all-around. People were groaning under high prices. Industries were facing an unprecedented crisis and there seemed to be no end to troubles. Confusion became worse confounded with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. (The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 completed people's misery). It was at this time that Auden was writing and publishing his poetry. It was then natural that the social, economic and political problems of the time found their way into his poetry. In Poem XXII of *Poems 1930* he wrote

> Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and chocked canals,
> Tramlines buckled, smashed trucks lying on their side across the rails,
> Power stations locked deserted since they drew the boiler fires,

Pylons fallen or subsiding, trailing dead high tension wires and fell sorry for the dark future of his country.

> Lawrence, Blake and Homer Lane, once healers in our English land,
> Those are dead as iron for ever ; these can never hold our hand

and wondered if things could ever be the same again

> Have things gone too far already ? Are we done for ? Must we wait ?
> Hearing doom's approaching foot steps regular down miles of straight

and ended the poem by exhorting people to sense the society from extinction

If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try.
If we don't, it doesn't matter but we'd better start to die.

Other poets of this period—Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice C. Day Lewis and Rex Warner—were equally concerned about the current social, economic and political conditions of the time. Auden became known as the leader of that group because his poetry had a remendous moral as well as aesthetic influence on the poetry of his tontemporaries. His *Poems 1930* as well as *The Orators* created a colitically oriented "movement" in poetry. It was mainly because puden had expressed in his poetry attitudes and emotions that Aurned out to be representing of a great many middle-class intellecttuals in symbols and language that were largely private and eccentric. Auden's early poetry succeeded in making a remarkable impact on the people because it was closely related to the political, social and intellectual climate of the nineteen-thirties. People widely believed that capitalism, the prime cause of people's misery was bound to destroy itself. Hence Auden's poem seemed to them very meaningful. They were also full of moral clarification and called upon the people to act.

Though there was no 'Movement' in poetry as such, yet critics invented the phrase, "The Auden Group Movement" because they wanted the poetry of these like-minded people (Day Lewis, S. Spender, MacNeice and Rex Warner) to take on the dimensions of a Movement. In this connection Day Lewis's note is very revealing:

". . . .in the sense of a concerted effort by a group of poets to impress themselves upon the public, to write differently from their predecessors or about different subjects, it was not a movement at all. Though Auden, Spender, Mac Neice and I have all known each other personally since the mid-thirties each of us had not even met all three others till after the publication of *New Signatures* in 1932, while it was only in 1947 that Auden, Spender and I found ourselves together for the first time in one room. We did not know we were a Movement until the critics told us we were."

It is largely true that the publication of *New Signatures* in 1932 helped the invention of the expression "The Auden Group Movement". As Michael Roberts, the editor of the *New Signatures* observed, Auden's *Poems 1930* and Day Lewis's *From Feather to Iron* (1931) were the first books in which imagery taken from contemporary life appeared as the natural and spontaneous expression of the poet's thought and feeling." Roberts also drew the attention of the intellectuals to the problems of the working class and urged upon them to identify themselves with the masses.

Rex Warner's novel *The Wild Goose Chase* published in 1937 presents in great detail the social and political condition of the thirties and dismisses the capitalist society as corrupt and demoralising.

The so-called Auden Group or "The Gang" was in fact born at

Oxford where Auden had gone to study in 1925. Edward Upward and C. Day Lewis met him there in 1926. Soon they became close friends. Rex Warner was a friend of Day Lewis and thus he also became a friend of Auden. In 1927 Stephen Spender also came to Oxford, and hearing about Auden's intellectual attainments approached him to seek his guidance in writing poetry. Auden often referred to all these friends and admirers as "The Gang." This Gang later became known as the Auden Group.

The members of this Group shared the myth that a border or frontier separates the healthy from the sick. In their works the chief characters are usually sick and make a journey across the borders. These characters are usually young but many of them die on the way.

Some critics have exaggerated the extent of Auden's political commitment. He was certainly interested in politics and became involved in it owing to the unusual condition of the country during the thirties. He was also drawn towards Marxism but it was only a passing phase. He was much more interested in the nature of man and his spiritual upliftment. His interest in psychology and concern for the "lonely, the lost and the unhappy" is ample proof of this. His later poetry is chiefly concerned with these serious issues. Since he believed that a writer cannot keep himself aloof from society, he took interest in the various problems that the society of his time was confronted with, but he advised fellow poets to develop a clinical attitude and write objectively and not get too much involved in the issues of time/But Auden is the most representative poet of the thirties for his poetry of this phase was closely related to the social and intellectual climate of the times, and that is why his poetry appealed to the people in general.

Q. 18. "The diversity of Auden's work is indeed amazing." Elaborate.

Or

Q. 19. "Auden seeks out new styles as a means of discovering new insights." Amplify.

Or

Q. 20. "In a critical estimate of Auden's poetry, 'style' is almost unusuable as a concept. He is so versatile that the styles at his command are bewilderingly complex." Discuss.

Or

Q. 21. "In metrics, in architectonics, as well as in handling of language, he is, of course, an incredible virtuoso—the most accomplished poet in English since the great 19th century masters." Do you agree with this view ? Give reasons for your answer.

Or

Q 22. Auden has been called "a stylistic chameleon". Why ?

Ans. Auden was a great and conscious artist. He attached great importance to style and experimented with all kinds of styles. One reason for this was that he exposed himself to a great variety of influences. Another reason was that the thirties during which he wrote most of his early poetry were a period of great crisis and hence he had to make constant adjustment in his form and technique. He wrote all kinds of poetry in all kinds of styles which often bewilder the critics.

The diversity of Auden's work is indeed amazing. Even in the small amount of poetry he had written by 1937, he made use of numerous devices. He experimented with new styles ranging from the prose of Henry James's late works to the nursery rhymes of Edward Lear. In between he wrote parodies, songs, ballads, operas etc.

His earliest poetry is mainly concerned with themes of youth and family ties. Though he never cared to polish his verses, his poetry seemed to arise from "inexhaustibly rich feelings" and made a tremendous impact on the readers. A frequent change of symbols often puzzled his readers as they were often private and personal, though they found his poetry unusually provocative.

Auden's early style has been called "telegraphese" by Louis Mac Neice because of his frequent leaving out of articles, relatives, connectives, pronouns and anxiliary verbs. The early style has, besides, a stark air, caused both by the ellipsis and by heavy debts to Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic verse. He was keen to experiment with all sorts of forms and manners of expression with a view to evolving a hard cerebral style.

Auden shows more trust in the efficaciousness of words in his early poems than in his later ones, though his images do not grow in any organic way. Sometimes his chain of words has no imaginative connection. His metaphors also do not suggest any higher meaning within themselves as symbols. But he was not incompetent. He could be highly suggestive, could see a connection, understand a nuance and grasp a revealing correspondence, but in the early poems he did not bother to be careful. He did not even pause to think whether a particular mode was suitable for a poem or not. Perhaps he realized this later when he dubbed his early poetry as "pure rubbish". This is however not a correct assessment for one cannot fail to see in his early poetry a rich sensibility and a considerable technical skill.

During 1933 and 1938 Auden experimented with a wide variety of traditi nal and popular forms as he wanted to popularise his ideas derived from Freud and Karl Marx and Homer Lane. The style of this period is known as Auden's middle style. The most outstanding feature of this style is the conversational meter. This was a logical outcome of his early effort to hammer out for himself "a supple and discursive style" capable of wide variation. The beginning of this new manner can be seen in poem XXII of *Poems 1930*. This is

achieved by a manipulation of speech rhythms in a manner as to produce a distinct tone of voice. The verse written in this manner is flexible yet firm, and is useful in many ways besides introducing direct conversation between the writer and the reader which Auden admired so much in W. B. Yeats.

After 1935 Auden eschewed the didactic element in his verse. He realised that he should use parables instead of preaching directly at his andience. Most of the developments in manner and technique from this time grow out of his search far more effective though always indirect didactic means.

In the mid-thirties Auden also wrote a good deal of lyrical poetry. The *Noves* contains some of his very fine lyrics. Auden's lyrics show an influence of Rilke who exhorted the poet to sit still and absorb, to 'bless what there is for being' The lyrics form a substantial and most distinguished part of Auden's poetic output.

During this period Auden also wrote several kinds of songs which are supposed to be his greatest accomplishment. They also constitute his most popular verse. It is in his songs that he was able to achieve the two things he had been constantly striving for : (1) intimate contact with the audience and (2) the quality of lightness in verse. Auden left no variety untouched; he wrote carols, ballads, sea shanties, nursery rhymes, blues waltz, spirituals, singing games, riddles etc.

In fact, Auden's belief that a poet shared write objectively and maintain a clinical detachment led him to write songs for he thought of songs as "the least personal and most verbal." Songs gave him an opportunity to experiment with light verse. He tried to his hand at all kinds of light verse—madrigal, limmerick, clerihew etc. in which he explored the principle of poetic unexpectedness which he had learnt from Kierkegaard as "the most direct source of aesthetic interest." Auden continued to apply this principle to his poetry and made it a part of his technique even in his later poetry. He could make the most serious point in an unserious way.

After the Second World War Auden stopped writing songs and instead started writing *opera libretti* : His contribution to the rehabilitation of *opera libretti* is formidable.

Though the most striking feature of the style of the mid-thirties is its popopular appeal, Auden alse wrote sophisticated poetry like the sonnets. He took Rilke's Sonnets Orpheus as his model and achieved great mastery in this form. He followed Rilke's characteristic device of putting unidentified persons (indicated by pronouns, he, she, they in the usually symbolic landscapes, with the sonnet beginning in the middle of an unexplained dramatic suggestion. Rilke's technique made possible the bringing together of the abstract and the concrete. To Auden as to Rilke, the inner and the outer worlds seemed to interpenetrate. The symbolism in Auden's early poems was natural. In the Quest Sonnets it became conscious and explicit.

Auden's imagination works largely in terms of dramatic images which are usually translations of abstract ideas. His greatest achievement in the realm of imagery is the recovery of the archaic imagery which is employed not for any picturesque use but for serving a fine irony which includes the poet as well as the class to which he belongs.

In the middle period Auden's imagery became more complex but less obscure. He could fuse different images into a coherent whole and make them more powerful as well as more meaningful. He also used a number of images in place of a single image to make the abstract concrete. His poem, therefore, got its meaning not from any image but from all the images taken together.

Auden used the simile also with great effect. The common qualities of his similes are similes or pungent consciousness and a starting contrast—a shock of surprise at the incongruity of the relationship called upon. This is usually produced by mating the abstract with the concrete, the idea or quality with the strikingly contemporaneous visual image. In his later poetry Auden used his simile rather sparingly.

The most common rhetorical figure in Auden's poetry is personification. This technique helps him in the dramatic structure of his poems as well as in his use of allegory. This also helps him in distinguishing between abstract things. Similarly Auden also presents mythological figures as personifications of certain qualities.

Auden also made extensive use of allegory. In fact, he preferred allegory to symbolism. He made allegory, do a lot more than merely enable the reader to understand the abstract or public meaning of a poem. His didactic approach required the reader to become involved in a process of self-assessment. Auden's allegory therefore first leads the reader to assent to the truth of a widely applicable insightment human existence and then he is supposed to apply the general truth to himself.

Auden has also written a number of poems in the particular allegorical genre he liked most—the allegorical landscape. Rilke had developed a device by which he expressed human life in terms of landscape. Auden following Rilke, cultivated this device extensively and found it so intriguing that he used it to conceive a moralized civilization. The condition of the countryside in his poems shows the general condition of the civilization. The landscape of "rusting machinery" and "abandoned mines", for example, rexeois "a lot about the country's soul."

Auden can make an allegorical use of almost any imagery. He can use material from mathematics—natural history, geology, metereology, archaeology, mythology, liturgies and cooking to provide the appropriate imagery for illustrating or embodying his schematic analysis. Thus most of his images whether taken from landscape or mathematics are moralized or humanized.

Auden used the device of allegory as a technique for bringing

the private into contact with the public and thus established a rapport between the poet and the public which had become so rare. He employed all the anti-Romantic techniques that suppress the private and the subjective and enabled him to establish a contact with the outside world.

Auden's early poetry suffered from an incongruity of theme and style—the theme was romantic and the style anti Romantic, but by 1940 this incongruity completely disappeared. In the later poems one cannot fail to notice a new development in style—the emergence of a kind of theological light verse. In the later verse one also finds the predominance of traditional stanza forms and unique creations like "streams". In his early verse he was opposed to the use of traditional forms but as he matured as a poet he displayed a profound concern for precision of formal control as a means of controlling and stimulating the imagination. Auden had very explicit views about verse forms and their importance. Once he had chosen a particular form for a poem he allowed the form to give direction and shape to his ideas. Thus the verse form has a special importance in Auden's creative process. He wanted to explore the potentialities of all possible forms and see what he could do with them. His most brilliant piece of technical virtuosity is "Canzone" (1945) where sixty-five lines employ only five rhyme words altogether. Since 1945 Auden created for himself a number of new forms which are as challenging as some of the traditional forms. Arbitrary imagery and unusual diction are the natural consequences of the rhyme and line length used, but they help to hide the harshness of language as in "streams".

The contribution of Auden's forms to his poems is great but this is ignored by critics who call him "a conscious artist." Auden's remark in this context is worth quoting :

'Those who confine themselves to free verse because they imagine that strict forms must of necessity lead to dishonesty do not understand the nature of art, how little the conscious artist can do and what large and mysterious beauties are the gifts of language, tradition and pure accident."

Auden has aptly been called a "stylistic chameleon". He tried so many styles because he wanted to avoid the kind of "personalism" that would make each of his poems an unmistakably Auden poem. He also warned other poets against using "an overpersonal" style. Besides, he also wanted to explore the potentialities latent in the self and the imagination. As Blair puts it "Auden seeks out new styles as a means to discovering new insights."

Q. 23. Write the critical note on Auden's imagery.

Or

Q. 24. "The reader will soon recognize in Auden's imagery a characteristic trait of much of the modernist poetry." Elaborate and discuss.

Or

Q. 25. Discuss, with illustrations, the use of contemporary imagery in Auden's poetry.

Ans. Modern poetry has often been described as obscure or difficult. Some readers have even found it bewildering. This is primarily due to the poet's use of imagery. Auden also uses imagery which often baffles the readers. Even in an early poem called "Petition", he uses difficult imagery. For example, he uses the phrase "a sovereign touch" which apparently refers to the custom of the sovereign's touching for the king's evil, but in the context of the poem this meaning does not help the reader. Probably, Auden is thinking of contemporary neuroses and comparing it with the disease cured by the sovereign's touch. Similarly, the phrase "liar's quinsy" seems ambiguous. Why should a liar be described as a person suffering from quinsy ? And why should the coward have a stance to be corrected ? Perhaps the poet is comparing the coward to an awkward athlete, but the reader is not sure.

But the questions raised by this poem are primarily questions of imagery. The poet's comparisons make the reading of the poem a difficult, if not an unpleasant task. The ordinary reader might begin by questioning the imagery for he finds in Auden's imagery a characteristic trait of much of the modernist poetry. He is reminded of Eliot's lines :

> . . . .the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table. . . .

Or Allen Tate's line

We are the eyelids of defeated caves. Such comparisons point to a mode of organization characteristic of modern poetry which often seem illogical or puzzling. This, therefore, leads us to the use of imagery in modern poetry. But here we shall confine ourselves to Auden's use of imagery.

Auden has used contemporary imagery like other modern poets but his greatest achievement in the realm of imagery is the recovery of the archaic imagery—fells, scraps overhung by kestrels, the becks with their potholes left by the receding glaciers of the age of ice, as in Poem XX of *Poems 1930*. His dominant contrast in the contrast between the scene described in the last stanza and the modern age of ice : foundries with their fires cold, flooded coal-mines, silted harbours—the debris of the new ice age. The advent of the new age of ice, a "polar peril", supplies the background for his finest poetry. In this poetry the archaic imagery is recovered--not as items of the picturesque but in the service of a fine irony which includes the poet as well as the class to which he belongs.

Auden also makes sharp contrasts of give vitality to his verse and for the purpose of satire. When he directs his satire at smugness

or complacency, he uses shocking contrasts which are sometimes involved in the central pattern of the poem. Auden uses the method of broad satire when he relies more heavily on the external framework to pull the poem together as in poem XVI of *Poems 1930*. The following lines from Section IV of the poem illustrate the unity Auden aims at

It is time for the destruction of error.
The chairs are being brought in from the garden
The summer talks stopped on that savage coast
Before the storms, after the guests and birds:
In sanatoriums they laugh less and less,
Less certain of cure ; and the loud madman
Sinks now into a more terrible calm.

The falling leaves knew it, the children,
At play on the fuming alkali-tip
Or by the flooded football ground, know it—
This is the dragon's day, the devourer's.

Apart from the fullness and richness of tone and the organic quality of the rhythm, the contrasts among the various items serve to build up the quiet but powerful irony which the poem achieves. The chairs are being brought in because of the fear of storm, but the preceding line mentions "destruction of error" as only a storm to be escaped by migrating to other lands. Another irony can be seen in the 'savage' cat attracting the gentle folk because it is savage and therefore, romantic and picturesque. The summer talk, the patient's laughter, and the cries of the madmen are ironically linked together in an insight which involves the nature of the whole civilization. In the last four lines the various images are closely related. The children, described as 'falling leaves' is a natural image but the fuming alkali-tip is not, and yet it is natural that the children should play upon it for they have no place but the industrial rubbish heaps to play upon. These innocent children know what is to come as the adults or the rulers do not. One can also see the connection between the reference to the children and the reference to the dragon, as the children are afraid of him. Ironically, therefore, as well as literally, it should be the children who know that the dragon's day has come. With the development of these ironies further relationships become obvious : the children, the madman, the sick, the leaves become related in their sharing of a knowledge which ironically is denied to the adults.

In the middle period Auden's imagery became more complex but less obscure. He could fuse different images into a coherent whole and make them more powerful as well as more meaningful. He also used a number of images in place of a single image to make the abstract concrete. The poem gets its meaning not from any one image but from all the images taken together.

Generally speaking, Auden gives us contemporary images. His use of everyday details is not very different from that of other members of the "pylon" school although he does not use the same determination to drag it in at all costs. We should, however, for clarity sake, distinguish between items drawn from the surface phenomenon of the times—the power-house, the dole-queen, the arterial road, the hiker, and of course, the electric pylon ; and those which are top-dressing to the mind of any informed contemporary—the death-wish, the dialectical struggle, the withering away of the state, neuroses and so on. Auden obviously prefers the latter. But neither in this nor in the associative flow of the images is he an innovator. He followed Eliot but he gave it the touch of his individuality.

Nevill Coghill, Auden's teacher at Oxford tells us that one day Auden announced that he had torn up all his poems because they were based on Wordsworth, and that henceforth Eliot would be his model. We recite two new poems of which Coghill says, "I was brought up to demand a logical as well as a sensual meaning in poetry, so his recitation was completely incomprehensible to me, though I was struck by some of the images that had a sudden but seemingly irrelevant force . . . .Auden explained with clarity and pity that to understand a poem was not a logical process, but a receiving, as a unity, a pat ern of coordinated images that had sprung from a free association of sub-conscious ideas, private to himself. He again recommended the works of Mr. Eliot. "The results of that influence can be seen particularly in the images—by no means 'private to himself' except in a few cases—in the poems of sociological reporting which appear in the 1930 volume and in "Look Stranger.". Their use requires a keen eye for the significant image, since so much depends on the suggestive power and the ordering of the separate items. By developing the method, Auden developed his naturally powerful selective eye and his ability to make 'objective' and epigrammatic social comment.

Auden is addicted to the bold 'theatrical' flourish, the flourish of "the governess in the dead of night giving the universe nought for behaviour", and of Michael Ransom's "I thought I saw the raddled sick cheeks of the world light up at my approach as at the homecoming of an only son." It is a quality which helps to give his verse its characteristic vigour ; when successful, the images condense, highlight and force the meaning on the reader's attention. Thus in the fifth age of "The Age of Anxiety," after a comparatively generalised contribution by Malin on the prosperous middle years of life, Emble suddenly gives freshness and contemporaneousness to his young man's sense of threat :

"Why leave out the worst
Pangs of youth ?. . . .
. . . .
. . . .To be young means
To be all on edge, to be kept waiting in

A packed lounge for a Personal call
From Long Distance, for the low voice that
Defines one's future."

This is an aspect of that allegorized manipulation of abstractions which Rilke assisted. It provides another approach to the problem of communication with an audience to whom bare abstractions would be often meaningless or of various meanings. The result is sometimes strange, often brilliant, always forceful. But the melodramatic is often substituted for the dramatic ; we hear the dreadfully modernistic voice of the cosmic travelogue as "stars cool" and the "planets rush towards Lyra." This was not frequent in the mid-thirties. A typical example is :

Abruptly mounting her ramshackle wheel,
Fortune has pedalled furiously away.

Fortune is one of the several personified abstractions which haunt Auden's verse.

In his later poetry too Auden uses contemporay images as, for example

"Fascinating like a tie
or "Packed with meaning like a van"
or "The Winter holds them like the opera"
or "Desire like a police-dog is unfastened"
or "The poet exploding like a bomb."

The common qualities here are pungent consciousness or a startling contrast—a shock of surprise at the incongruity of the relationship called up. This is usually produced by mating the abstract with the concrete, the idea or quality with the strikingly contemporaneous visual image. The effect can be sharp and stimulating; in addition, it can easily sound rather desperate and bitter. It is probably this quality which has particularly attracted writers in this century. T. S. Eliot has "Streets that follow like a tedious argument"; Graham Greene's *Ministry of Fear* begins thus : "There was something about a fair which . . . . called him like innocence. "Stephen Spender has 'intangible as a stock-exchange rumour,' Day Lewis has both 'familiar as Sunlight' and familiar as working clothes".

Thus, Auden is not the only one to use contemporary imagery. This is a common characterstic of most modern poetry.

Q. 26. Comment on Auden's use of allegory in his poems.

Or

Q. 27. "Auden preferred allegory to symbolism." Discuss.

Ans. Auden made extensive use of allegory in his poems. In fact, he preferred allegory to symbolism. In one of his comments he pointed out the difference between allegory and symbolism :

"Allegory is a form of rhetoric, a device for making the abstract concrete; in nearly all successful allegory and the images used do in fact have a symbolic value over and above their allegorical use, but that is secondary to the poet's purpose".

Auden made "the poet's purpose" the test for the presence of allegory. But by do ng so he allowed a certain latitude in the reader's response. His early poems are more often than not part of large psychological allegory. Auden gave most of his psychological messages through allegory rather than through direct statements.

Auden's scenery is either a backcloth against which some human situation is considered or a symbol for some activity of the psyche, in neither case is it regarded as of much interest in itself. He usually spots the human addition to a natural scene. When he mentions the pollen finding the pistil, he compares it to a burglar making an entry; and wild animals interest him chiefly as reminders, by contrast. of human guilt.

Auden's geography is always political or economic, the geography of the Prologue to "Look Stranger", the opening chorus of *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and poem XXIX of *Poems 1930* where the wealthy residents of the sport Hotel are envisaged :

> "...Constellated at reserved tables
> Supplied with feeling by an efficient band
> Relayed elsewhere to farmers and their dogs
> Sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens."

Auden is aware of the geographical pattern mainly as it reinforces his sociology. So, in "Spain"—before reaching the final section—his glace traces this :

> On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
> Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe,
> On that tabeland scored by rivers,
> Our fever's menacing shapes are precise and alive.

Whatever Auden describes he cannot forget that he is implicated in the sickness of western civilization. Hence his natural scenery is usually volcanic or glacial regions whose barrenness is broken only by rocks. Such regions are not usually backgrounds to human activity but symbols, translations of abstract ideas. His shorter metaphors are very often drawn from climate and environment.

To turn abstractions into terms of an allegorical landscape seems indeed to be characterstic of Auden's mind. Conversely, a landscape can bring to mind, sharply and symbolically, some abs-

tract comment on life or the psyche. Gonzalo in *The Sea and the Mirror* likens himself to

> Some ruined tower by the Sea
> Whence boyhoods growing and afraid
> Learn a formula they need
> In solving their mortality.

The four characters in "The Age of Anxiety" describe the seven ages of man predominantly in landscape allegory, and the seven stages which follow are stages through various landscapes. One of Auden's favourite images is of country children (innocence) being beckoned to make the journey to town (knowledge, sin). Auden's main interest is in man's attempt not simply to tame a savage nature but to understand himself.

Since the later 'thirties the influence of Rilke greatly strengthened and extended Auden's manipulation of abstractions through allegory :

"One of the constant problems of the poet is how to express abstract ideas in concrete terms . . . Rilke is almost the first poet since the seventeenth century to find a fresh solution . . . (he) thinks of the human in terms of the non-human, . . . one of (his) most characterstic devices is the expression of human life in terms of landscape."

Auden's liare, upland regions provide a particular view of the world below, a panoramic view, the view of the hawk or the Airman. He introduces these figures when he talks of looking at society as the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman. In *The Orators* the important figure of the Airman symbolises the forces of release and liberation. The Airman, well-equipped with scientific knowledge and confident, makes a general survey and comes down to heal. There is something of the pedant about him; he intends to teach and reform; his moralist's eye sweeps widely, selecting the typical images he needs.

Auden makes allegory to a lot more than merely enable the reader to understand the abstract or public meaning of a poem. His didactic approach required the reader to become involved in a process of self-assessment. An allegory, therefore, must first lead the reader to assent to the truth of a widely applicable insight into human existence. Then only will the reader go to apply the general truth to himself. To quote Auden's own words :

"The present day reader of poetry has to make an effort that was not demanded of readers in earlier times; he has to translate what is actually said in a poem into the terms of his analogous experiences."

Auden wants his readers to see the particulars of a poem through its abstract and general significance to his own personal self-examination. He uses allegory specifically for this purpose. Any

image is good enough for Auden so long as it helps the reader to grasp the 'abstract' truth he has in mind.

Auden has also written a number of poems in the particular allegorical genre he liked most—the allegorical landscape. Following Rilke he cultivated and perfected the device of expressing human life in terms of landscape. Auden found this device so intriguing that he used it to conceive a moralized civilization. The condition of the countryside in his poems shows the general condition of the civilization. The landscape of "rusting machinery" and "abandoned mines", for example, reveals "a lot about the country's soul".

The idea of the allegorized landscape has been best developed in the first section of "The Shield of Achilles" called Bucolics (Though they are called Bucolics, they are not pastorals, strictly speaking as they do not bring in shephereds or rural life but are about man's relationship with nature in one particular way. Each of the Bucolics deals with a natural force or object and the human qualities and attitudes it suggests.) Here human life has been expressed in terms of the landscape. Human faculties have been projected into the landscape. The Bucolics are basically Auden's commentary on the kinds of people who would have lakes, mountains etc. as their ideal Innocent Places.

Auden can make an allegorical use of almost every imagery. He can use material from mathematics, natural history, geology, meteorology, archaelogy, mythology, liturgics and cooking to provide the appropriate imagery for illustrating or embodying his schematic analysis. Thus most of his images whether taken from landscape or mathematics are moralized or humanized.

Auden used the device of allegory as a technique for bringing the private into contact with the public and thus established a rapport between the poet and the public which had become so rare. He employed all the anti-Romantic techniques that suppress the private and the subjective and enabled him to establish contact with the outside world.

The allegorical significance of a poem apparently draws on a meaning established outside the poem in the private myth. To construct an allegory Auden first locates the right sort of concrete images. He generally avoids traditional and conventional allegorical images as they invited stereotyped responses. He uses new or contemporary images which may apparently seem incongrueus or even ambiguous but they serve Auden's purpose best. An eminent example is "Petition" the phrases like "Sovereign touch" and the "liar's quinsy" do not become clear to the reader who thinks that the poet is indulging in a private poke. But the questions raised by this poem are primarily question of imagery. The images used here indicate the condition of the psyche or the soul. The individual images are important only in so far as they provide a particularization of the general point.

The title poem in "The Shield of Achilles" treats the work

of art as a mirror of life. As in Homer's *Iliad* the Shield symbolises art or image of the human condition. The modern shield is without any beauty or goodness that is, Auden means to say that the modern world is devoid of goodness and beauty. The whole structure of this poem is based on the idea that without the cnristian faith, the romance of the Homeric legend would become as ugly as the present world.

Thus it is clear that Auden used allegory as his main device to draw the reader's attention to the present state of society which was the poet's supreme concern.

Q. 28. How does Auden use the conventions of the ballad and folk-song to provide a basis for collective emotion in his poetry?

Or

Q. 29. Write a note on Auden's popular songs.

Or

Q. 30. Attempt a critical study of Auden's popular light verse.

Or

Q. 31. "Ballads are Auden's fine achievement in poetry". Discuss.

Ans. In his Introduction to the Oxford Book of Light Verse, Auden writes :

"When the things in which he sees about him, are much the same as those of his audience, and that audience is a fairly large one, he will not be conscious of himself as an unusual person, and his language will be straight forward and close to ordinary speech. When, on the other hand, his interests and perceptions are not readily acceptable to society, or his audience is a highly specialized one, perhaps of fellow poets he will be acutely aware of himself as the poet, and his method of expression may depart very widely from the normal social language.

In the first case his poetry will be light in the sense in which it is used in this anthology. Three kinds of poetry have been included :

(1) Poetry written for performance, to be spoken or sung before an audience [e.g. Folk-songs; the poems of Tom Moore].

(2) Poetry intended to be read, but having for its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being [e.g. the poems of Chaucer, Pope, Byron]".

(3) Such nonsense poetry as, through its properties and technique, has a general appeal [e.g. Nursery rhymes, the poems of Edward Lear].

Auden himself wrote a lot of popular light verse after 1935. His early poetry was serious and didactic but between 1933 and 1938 he experimented with a wide variety of traditional and popular forms. This was part of his effort to evolve ' a supple or discursive style capable of wide variation. The style of this period usually called his 'middle style' is characterized by a lightness of tone. Whereas his early poetry had tended to the private and was inclined towards fantasy, the poetry of this period tended to the public.

Auden wrote light verse not for pleasure's sake but because lightness in poetry assures a rather close relation between the poet and his audience. Auden felt that he could reach a large audience only through light verse and so he started using the language of popular songs and speech. Light verse provided him a stimulus to develop his unserious technique A close look at one representative poem would reveal the origin of the technique that was to stay with him in some measure for the rest of his life. During twenty-five years that he used this technique he tried his hand at all kinds of light verse—madrigal, limmerick, clarihew, blues and ballads. But he excelled in the ballad form which in his hands revived the case and flexibility of the folk type. "As I walked out one evening" is his most representative ballad. The poem is introduced by a passive observer whose report appears truthful because he gives exact details. This persona of Auden is replaced by the lover in the second stanza The lover is making love with his beloved under the Railway bridge and singing songs full of romantic exaggeration in typical folk-song manner :

> I'll love you till the Ocean
> Is folded and hung up to dry.

From the sixth to the fourteenth stanza, Time talks about the miserable lot of man and contrasts it with the happy fairy tale world of childhood :

> Where the beggars raffle the bank notes
> And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
> And the Lily white Boy is a Roarer,
> And Jill goes down on her back.

The conversational tone, particularly of the last line, is Auden's successful achievement in poetry. One is immediately startled by the slang that he had not come across in poetry before. Although the poem maintains a level of exaggeration in imagery which is in keeping with the folk-song form, it does not consider sentimental love or the norms of polite diction as binding. Nevertheless the ease and flexibility of the folk ballad form is there in full measure and it is as singable as any ballad. This is Auden's great achievement in writing modern light verse.

Auden knows that the most direct source of the aesthetic interest is the unexpected or incongruous. First he raises in the reader's mind a set of expectations and then disappoints him by introducing the incongruous. The lover in the ballad referred to above indulges in extravagant romantic fancy but nobody is supposed to take him seriously. Similarly in another popular ballad "Victor", Victor's falling in love with Anna, their marriage and his murdering of Anna after he suspects her infidelity are not to be taken too seriously as the elements of exaggeration and overstatement become obvious from the very beginning. The unexpected fate of Jill, Miss Gee and Anna is supposed to shock the reader but the effectiveness of the device of the Poetic Unexpected or the Incongruous depends upon the extent to which expectations are aroused in the reader.

Auden had learnt from Kierkegaard that "the most direct source of aesthetic interest is the unexpected or the incongruous." Auden continued to apply this principle to his poetry and made it a part of his technique. He could make the most serious point in an unserious way. This led Stephen Spender to remark that a kind of frivolity is dominant in Auden's poetry. There is no doubt that Auden successfully cultivated a style in which he could beat the most serious subjects in a trivial way. In his Introduction to the Oxford Book of Light Verse he claimed that "light verse can be serious". And he employed light verse for many serious subjects. Light verse provided him an excellent vehicle for treating serious subjects in a lowbrow manner. Light verse also suggested striking variations on old saws or folk figures and verse forms in which colloquical diction and witty rhymes were appropriate.

Auden's Light Verse in considerable. In his Collected Poetry he devoted an entire fortytwo page section to "Songs and Other Musical" pieces. During 1933 and 1938 Auden wrote songs of all kinds. Besides ballads, he wrote carols, sea shanties, nursery rhymes, blues, waltz, spiritual singing games, riddles etc. These constitute his greatest accomplishment in Light Verse or Populor Verse. It is in the songs that he was able to achieve the two things he had been constantly striving for : (1) an intimate contact with the audience, and (2) the quality of lightness in the verse,

Auden's songs may be divided into two categories : Popular Songs and Art Songs. Popular Songs are those that were written to fit an exciting tune or to suggest a specfiic kind of music (blues, waltz, ballad); Art songs are those that were written with the intention of being suitable for musical setting of whatever sort this composer chooses. They produce the impression of special suitability for musical setting. Art songs often are like lyrics and sometimes it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two.

Auden's plays also have songs but they belong to the category of Popular Songs. The influence of Brecht is obvious in these songs. Though the begining of this kind of song was made in *Poem 1930*, yet the full flowering of this technique takes place in the plays and

the poems benefit from it later. "As I walked one evening" is the best poem of this kind. Auden refused to call it a ballad but described it a "pastiche of folk-song". It is certainly not a ballad in the sense in which "Miss Gee" is a ballad or "Victor" is a ballad, as it is closer to folk poetry than to ballad.

One important type of popular songs is Songs of Children. Simple in form, they are like nursery rhymes or the hymns or the traditional verse for children. Here Auden might have derived his inspiration from Blake's *Songs of Experience.*

Art songs are written to be set to music. They should at least produce the illusion of being specially suitable for musical setting. Auden had a good background of music. He had been a singer and a pianist. He said that the intention of writing music produced new and beautiful kinds of poetry and that it was a close association of poets and musicians that produced so rhythmical a poetry in the Elizabethan age. Auden's "Look Stranger, on this Island" is a beautiful musical poem.

Auden's experience of writing sometimes explicitly for music and often with the possibility of musical setting had a great effect on his poetry in general. He maintained his interest in the relation of music and poetry and wrote several critical essays on the subject.

Auden's fondness for light verse was also the consequence of his belief in the theory of objectivity (a clinical attitude) in poetry. After 1935 he consciously started using words in an unserious way, no matter how serious the theme of the poem. Even in his nature poems, to use Blair's words, have the flavour of comic verse in which droll image or the witty incongruity may appear at any moment. "Dame kind," for example, has a serious subject but the style is not as its word choices and conversational flow give it a comic flavour. The conversational meter was an important characterstic of Auden's middle style or the style of the period during which he wrote his popular verse. The beginnings of the conversational meter can be seen in poem XXII of *Poems 1930*. This is achieved by a manipulation of speech rhythms in a manner as to produce a distinct tone of voice. The earliest practitioners or the conversational meter were Langland and Skelton. It was taken up later by Dryden and in the modern time by Hopkins, Walt Whitman, D.H. Lawrence and last but not the least, T. S. Eliot. The verse written in this manner is flexible yet firm, and is useful in many ways besides introducing direct communication between the poet and the reader which Auden admired so much in the poetry of W. B. Yeats.

Q. 32. Describe Auden's poetic achievement, illustrating from the poems prescribed.

Or

Q. 33. "Auden is the most important and influential modern poet after T. S. Eliot." Comment.

Or

Q. 34. "Auden is a second-generation modern." Do you agree with this view ? Give reasons for your answer.

Or

Q. 35. Do you consider Auden a major modern poet ? What are his claims for this position ?

Ans. Critics are sharply divided in their opinion about Auden's position in modern poetry. Although in 1970, John Fuller remarked that "for breadth, wisdom, myth, moral power and sheer technical excitement, Auden is the greatest living poet writing in English" yet Auden's reputation has not always been the same. When he began writing poetry critics saw in him a poet of great promise, a prodigy, a Messiah, and hailed him as the leader of a literary group committed to a radical political programme. But those who had pinned their hopes on his political leadership became disillusioned when Auden renounced Marxism, went back to the Christian fold and started writing religious poetry. His migration to America made some critics so bitter that they started tearing his reputation to pieces. They claimed that Auden was an immature, frivolous and irresponsible poet who should not be taken seriously.

But for a brief enthusiasm of the Marxists, Auden has not been championed by any critical movement, the criticism that was required to explain or defend Eliot, for example, was largely irrelevant to him. Auden was an old fashioned or traditional poet in his conception of the poet's role, but at the same time, highly modern in his technique. He did not restrict poetry to its quintessential function, its purest and most intense manifestations like Eliot. He was copious, facile, versatile. He wrote to entertain and instruct as well as to produce the more subtle and profound affects of poetry, and he dealt often with contemporary ideas and topical events. He wrote many different kinds of poetry in highly varied styles and forms. He used the traditional genres for more than most moderns—ode, sonnet, elegy, eclogue; song, epistle, oratario, closet drama—and writes occasional poems on events public and private. He adopted the persona (including typical verse forms) of earlier poets from Langland to Blake, Burns and Byron and he wrote brilliant parodies and pastiches. He was an indefagitable teacher and gave his didactic impulse full reign.

At the same time he was one of the most inward and subjective of poets. Taken individually his poems are often extremely obscure. They are, therefore, also suited than those of modern poets to the kind of critical treatment that begins by considering the poem as an isolated, independent entity (as the New Critics would like a poem to be). Taken together however, his poems create a cosmos, a poetic universe with its repeated symbolic properties, from landscape to typical characters and recurrent situation. Modern Critics can, of course, deal beautifully with the artist's construction of a private symbolic world (as in early Eliot and later Yeats), but the mixture

of these with the more external kinds of form, together with the outcry about Auden's politics, made them slow to see this aspect. Marxist Critics soon found him too privatebut "new critics" considered him to public ; hence neither dealt with him satisfactorily. Similarly, the musical aspect of Auden's verse—the fact that he was the finest writer of songs, ballads, libretti, and other forms for music amongthe modern poets—has been recognized only slowly because it is remote from the popular conception of Auden.

In temperament, and in quality of the imagination as well as in interests, Auden was in some respects more like a scientist than like the typical modern poet. His knowledge of biology and psychology was extensive and current, and he was widely read in anthropology, geology and other related sciences. A certain detachment, sometimes a remoteness. are manifest in his attitude, he often viewed human life from a great distance, concerning himself with the differences between man and the other animals and between man and the rest of nature, or with man in the vast perspective of geological or evolutionary time. Often his imagination tended to generalisation like that of a scientist. But against this tendency to abstraction there is the vividly specific and concrete quality of his imagination, and against the detachment and remoteness there are the compassion, tolerance and sympathy for "ordinary" people and things that have grown more and more marked in his verse. Further, there is the concern with the supernatural apparent not only in the religious aspects of the verse (which is present from the beginning) but also in the denial of the "magical" function of poetry and the later definitions of it as embodying sacred awe.

Auden was so much concerned with man in society and so anxious to communicate that poetry became his natural way of speaking.

His constant experimentation, his search for form, the uncertainty about his audience, the difficulties in belief and the split between the poet and the moralist made him an unsatisfactory poet to many a critic, but Auden's achievement is great. He has written a good many poems which are memorable by the strictest standards. By his skill and energy he did much to enliven English verse in the thirties and his constant experiments brought new laurels to English poetry both in the fifties and the sixties. He also produced some very fine songs, and was unusually successful in light ironic verse. His work is not without faults but it reveals important qualities of imagination, for example, his extra-ordinary social and psychological perceptiveness, and his command of the dramatic image.

He was extra-ordinarily sensitive to the tensions of his age and was as much preoccupied with the pressures society puts upon the inner life of the individual as T.S. Eliot. He constantly asked himself as to how he could express the experience of mankind (not his own experience, as that would make him a Romantic). He was, in spite of his facetiousness which impelled him to a discipline of loneliness and of endless self-examination. He wrote :

"The alternative (to a new form of catholic belief which Auden thinks could only be imposed crudely today) is the acceptance by every individual of his aloneness and his responsibility for it—and a willingness continually to re-examine his absolute assumptions in the light of his own experience and that of others." •

On the issue of the relationship between poetry and morals he said:

"Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible to make a rational and moral choice."

Thus Auden's work is bound to be, in Richard Hoggart's words, "a civilizing force." It may not solve all our problems, but it can make us more humane and sensitive in dealing with them. If we do not merely look at his poems in isolation but examine the relation of his work to the larger human world, we will find that Auden is certainly a great poet, and is gifted with what it called a "vision"—Auden believed that to be authentic "a work of art must exhibit two extraordinary qualities, the quality of alwaysness and the quality of nowness. It must remain of permanent significance to later generations, whatever historical changes man occur, and it must have the uniqueness which comes from being made by a unique human being at a unique point in time. If it lacks alwaysness, it is merely a fashionable entertainment . . . , if it lacks nowness, it lacks life."

Auden's "vision" does have a quality of timelessness which characterized the best poets of the past. He drew upon the reservoirs of universal imagery in dreams, folk-tales and mythology. He gave expression to the basic philosophic and religious insights of western culture. Hence he belongs to the great tradition of moral and philosophic poets who showed constant concern for human nature. His emphasis upon love as the guiding principle of life places him in the true Christian tradition. "What matters is the love we give, not the love me receive," was his message to mankind. He came a long journey—from love of the community to despondency to transcendental faith, from transcendental faith to a too-complacent pre-occupation with technical devices; at the end, it would be seen that the poet had found, or found again, the love of man; no longer of man as the anonymous community, but of man as an individual. To love the community truly one must see in it not just one anonymous face but many faces, each one different, and in each recognize a brother. This is the way Auden showed his readers—perhaps the noblest way that man can take.

Thus, with his concern for man, his constant insistence on the necessity of re-establishing contact with the world outside one's own subjectivity, and his emphasis on the poet's bringing his private vision into contact with the public world, will continue to draw the

attention of serious readers of poetry for years to come. He belongs to us and to our times.

Many critics, however, have been hesitant in calling him a modern poet, or have called him modern with some reservations. John Blair called him "a second generation modern". Auden was certainly very traditional in his views about the function of poetry and about the form of poetry, but in his desire to seek a large audience, in his zeal to reform the society and in his deep interest in contemporary ideas and science, he was truly modern. He could also turn inward when he wished and leave his poetry as obscure as any modern poet. He gave expression to the modern sense of loss and anxiety without the apparatus of polyglot scholarship such as *The Waste Land* presented. Over and above all, he was highly modern in technique. His technical skill has been looked upon by poets of our time both with awe and envy. Professor Joseph Warren Beach is right when he calls Auden "a typically modern poet, who sedulously avoids the frontal attack on his subject, whose thought is characteristically rendered by the 'oblique' or 'indirect' method, the terms of his discourse being, not philosophical abstractions and plain statements of fact, but symbols, myths and implications whose effects are complicated by the use of such rhetorical devices as irony, ambiguity and dramatic impersonation." Like others of his time, Professor Beach aptly concludes, "he aims at brevity, condensation rather than at diffuseness and elaboration."

When the dust of controversy has settled down (the balance of criticism is already going down in Auden's favour) Auden will be discovered to be a major modern poet, and in influence and importance, next only to T. S. Eliot.

Cri of Poetry

W. H. Auden is, after T. S. Eliot, the most important poet of our time. Auden is also the most representative of the intellectual trends of the nineteen-thirties when he was widely accepted as the leading British poet of that decade. After his departure for the United States, he suddenly became a controversial poet. Many critics thought that his poetry suffered a serious setback, but many others saw in his new poetry a continuity, a technical virtuosity and a fulfilment of his early aspirations.

Here is a full-length critical study of Auden's work dealing exhaustively with the British Auden, the American Auden and the playwright Auden. The author has carefully traced the various influences that went into the shaping of his ideas, themes and style. Auden's manifold interests—social, psychological, scientific and religious receive due attention. His complex style and its almost innumerable varieties have been dealt with in a separate chapter with utmost clarity. The chapter "Auden as a Playwright" provides an incisive and provocative interpretation of his plays. The author has also critically analysed a few poems to bring Auden within the reach of the average reader.

This book, thus, has an ample fare for both the advanced reader and the post-graduate Indian student. The author has eminently succeeded in salvaging Auden's reputation as a major modern poet.

An up-to-date Bibliography gives suggestions for further reading.

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